The Bridge of Beauty

Mrs. G. Linnæus Banks

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Yours faithfully
Isabella Banks.

THE BRIDGE OF BEAUTY

THE SEARCH FOR THE MISSING FARMER.

Frontispiece.] [*See page* 16.

THE

BRIDGE OF BEAUTY

A Fiction Founded on Fact

BY

MRS. G. LINNÆUS BANKS

AUTHOR OF 'GOD'S PROVIDENCE HOUSE,' 'THE MANCHESTER MAN,' 'IN HIS OWN HAND,' ETC. ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY W. DEWAR

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THE BRIDGE OF BEAUTY.

CHAPTER I.

A THUNDERSTORM.

IT was a sad day for Mrs. Edwards, of Eglwysilan,[1] when her well-loved husband, on his return from Llantrissant market one sultry Friday in the autumn of 1721, in attempting to cross the River Taff, failed to observe its rising waters, missed the ford, and was carried down the stream, a drowning man.

Only that morning he had driven a goat and a score of sheep across in safety, the sheep following their agile and sure-footed leader, as he sprang from one to another of the out-cropping masses of rock, which, scattered in mid-stream, served alike as stepping-stones and as indications when the river was fordable, as it generally was in a dry summer.

But the Taff, born in a marsh, and running through a deep vale, is given to rise as swiftly as the traditional Welshman's temper. Many are its seen and unseen

[1] Pronounced Egloois-ilian.

feeders among the mountain steeps; and, although there had been but a light passing shower in sheltered hill-side Llantrissant that day, farther north a heavy thunderstorm had burst in a deluge over bogs and hills; and down from countless rills and rivulets the waters had come flashing in leaps and bounds, to swell the tribute brooks and rivers alike bore to the Taff as vassals to a sovereign.

William Edwards was as steady a man as any farmer in Glamorganshire, but whenever a group of them got together, at fair or market, there great pitchers of *cwrw da*[1] were certain to be also, either to cement friendship or to clinch a bargain, and the beverage was uncommonly heady.

Now bargaining was a long and thirsty process, and, although he was thrifty and the ale was dear, when Edwards had completed the sale of goat and sheep to his satisfaction, he had imbibed a fair share of the common beverage; not, however, so much as to prevent other huckstering and bargaining on account of his wife. The stockings knitted on the farm had to be sold, or bartered for needles, pins, tapes, or shoe-latchets; he had to purchase a sieve, a supply of soap and candles, a pair of Sunday shoes for his little girl, and a couple of tin cans.

By the time these were thrust into his saddle-bags, the sieve and tinware secured to the pommel of his saddle so as to balance each other above the bags, and a final draught of *cwrw* swallowed as a refresher for his

[1] *Cwrw da*, good ale. The *w* has the sound of *oo*; thus *cooroo*.

journey, the afternoon had slipped nearly away, and with it one or two impatient neighbours on whom he had depended for company on the rough, circuitous road over the mountain ridge to the fords.

Rough road indeed it was, little better than a beaten track worn by men and beasts constrained to pass that way; a road unsought except in dry weather, a rugged descent from Llantrissant to the ford of the Rhonda, and then up and down again, with stones and tree-roots lying in wait to trip unwary feet; for at that period the picturesque Vale of Taff was thickly wooded and scantily populated, and the roads were little better than deep gullies or natural stairways.

His sturdy Welsh pony, however, was a thorough mountaineer, and, left to himself, jogged along without stumbling or straying, whatever the hour or the road. He took to the water and crossed the ford of the swollen Rhonda safely enough, although twilight was falling; but the evening shadows had deepened with every mile they trod, and grew heavier as they descended towards the larger river, with darkening woods on either hand, for there they rode through a veil of blinding mist.

The mist had been gathering and the water rising rapidly, when Owen Griffith, one of his neighbours, who had prudently quitted the market three-quarters of an hour earlier than Edwards, finding the river evidently on the rise, had deemed it only wise to trust his pony's sagacity to find a trustworthy ford rather than depend on his own eyesight.

It was quite a matter for after conjecture, but it was

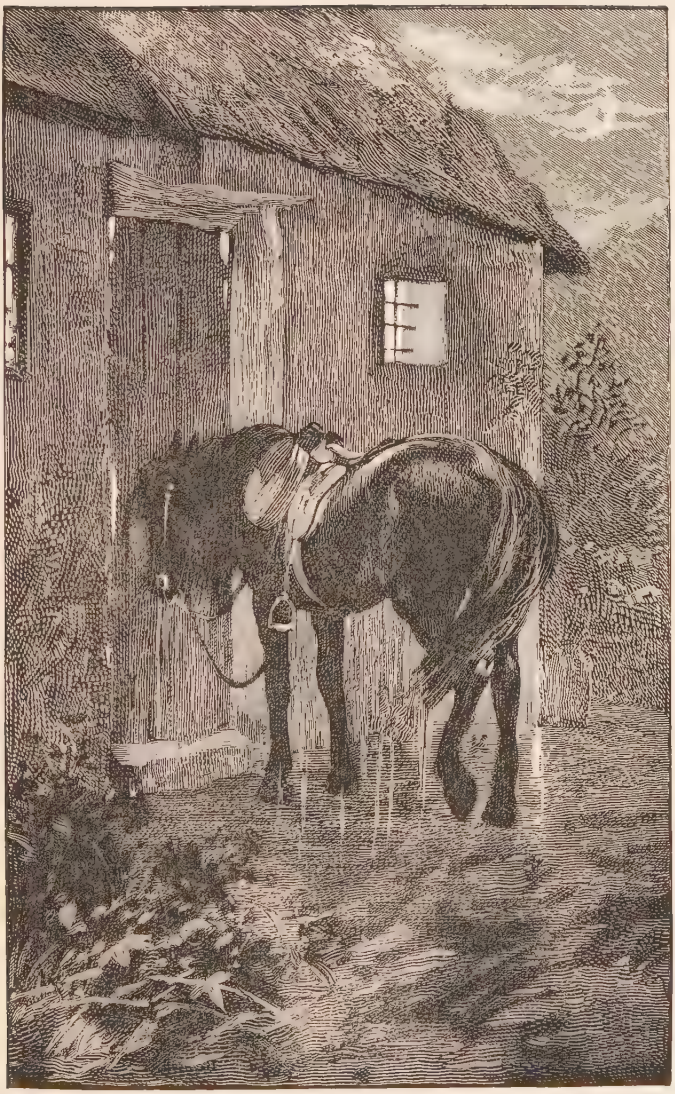
always supposed that the sagacious animal Edwards bestrode had grown restive and refused to take the unsafe crossing, and that he,—a man doggedly obstinate and wise in his own conceit,—unable to discern a reason for his faithful beast's rebellion, had forcibly compelled the reluctant animal to attempt the ford in spite of its resistance, as shown by hoof-marks beaten in upon the bank.

Be that as it may, the riderless horse found its way home to the woodside farm on Eglwysilan Mountain, wet, foaming, and panting; the saddle and saddle-bags, drenched with discoloured water, telling all too surely that the uneasily watching wife was a widow, her four children fatherless. In such moments the mind always grasps at the worst suggestion.

The distracted woman rushed shrieking to her nearest neighbour. Her awakened boys called after her, but she heard them not.

The alarm spread. In an incredibly short space of time, considering how far apart lay the farms, and how few were the cottage homes, a score or two of half-dressed men and barefooted women were running or riding to the rescue, if such were possible. And wherever was practicable path or foothold, lanthorns were flashing along the steep and densely wooded banks upon the swiftly running river; but though it was seen where the poor horse had contrived to scramble up the bank, there was no sign of him they sought so anxiously.

The more fortunate beast had had a narrow escape.



THE RIDERLESS HORSE FOUND ITS WAY HOME.—*See page* 16.

Not forty yards ahead the chafing Rhonda came leaping and foaming to the deathly embrace of the Taff, and in the swirl of the confluent waters all hope was lost.

Yet still the despairing widow urged the wearied explorers on; and moved by her piteous entreaties, Owen Griffith, their near neighbour, declared he would not give up the search until the farmer was found, dead or alive, if he had to go as far as Cardiff to find him. The man was ill at ease, feeling as if a little more urgency on his part might have drawn Edwards away from the market in time for safety.

His determination arrested the steps of several others who were on the point of turning back, and they joined him readily, but only on the condition that Mrs. Edwards should return home with the rest of the women, and leave the search to them. 'You will be best at home, look you! Women have no business here!' said they, unnerved by her white face and stifled sobbing.

'Yes, yes, Jane,' urged the women. 'Think you of your children, do; and come back. It's crying in the dark, and all alone they will be, yes indeed!'

And moved by the picture of her desolate children in their affright and grief, the sorrowing and agitated mother was drawn homewards, by the strong cords of maternal affection, to clasp them in her arms, and stifle her own anguish in attempts to impart the comfort she could not yet take to her own stricken heart.

She was a religious woman, with a simple, unquestioning faith in the wisdom and love of her Heavenly

Father; and who shall say the effort held for her no healing balm?

If she wept, she also prayed; and although two of her children, William, not yet a three years boy, and Jonet, a girl of four, were too young to enter into the depths of her grief, or comprehend her prayers, David and Rhys,[1] respectively nine and twelve, were old enough to understand, and to feel how disastrous a calamity had fallen upon them unawares.

Before midnight the three youngest had cried themselves to sleep. Only Rhys remained, with his arms around his mother's neck, to share her terrible night-watch, and wait for what day might bring; his overflowing young heart swelling with unexpressed resolves to be her shield and protector when he should grow a man.

In the grey of the morning Owen Griffith and his helpers came upon what they sought a few miles below Treforest, on the eastern bank of the river, flung ashore like a weed by the inflowing current of the Rhonda, and left there by the rapid subsidence of the temporary spate. Soberly and reverently they laid it on an extemporised litter of boughs and reeds, covering the face with Owen's coat, and slowly re-trod the miles to lay the disfigured dead down on the bed from which a hearty man had risen the preceding morn.

There is no antidote to inconsolable grief like active employment, work which exercises hand and brain and cannot be set aside. Such is the daily work on a farm; and though kindly neighbours had taken care of the

[1] Rhys, pronounced Rees.

poor horse and its burden, had dressed the younger children, and volunteered assistance in other small household matters, neither the cows nor the goats would submit to be milked by strange hands.

Mrs. Edwards had, fortunately, no time to indulge in grief. She was a woman of determined energy and practical piety; and after the first overwhelming outburst of natural emotion, turned to her ordinary duties as if awakened to the consciousness that all the care and responsibility of farm and family rested on her individual shoulders.

Dashing the tears from her eyes, she snatched up a milking-stool and pail, and was off up the hill-side, Rhys darting after her with a smaller stool and pail to milk the she-goats, not for the first time, but for the first time voluntarily. His initiatory lessons had been taken that summer, with his father standing over him to keep the refractory in order, whether biped or quadruped.

He had not taken kindly to the task at the time, having all a boy's fondness for play, and would rather have gone bird-nesting than goat-milking. But *now* that his father was gone—so suddenly taken from them—he, too, seemed to feel as if new duties devolved on him, and that, boy though he was, he must aim at the work of a man, and spare his widowed mother all he could.

The idea was scarcely spontaneous. He had overheard a knot of gossips lamenting that Farmer Edwards had not left a son old enough to take his place on the farm, and help his mother to rear the younger ones as

in duty bound. And he had straightway resolved to prove the gossips in the wrong.

'If I am not old enough to take my father's place, I am old enough to do my duty, and I shall get older and stronger every year. They shall see what I can do to help mother; and as for my brothers and sister, am I not the eldest, and ten whole years older than William? Sure I can take care of them—at least I can try.'

If this was not absolutely the boy's colloquy, it comes near enough to its spirit. There was something of the father's masterfulness in Rhys, and, directed to noble purposes, it might serve the widow in good stead. And noble purpose may be shown in small things as in great; indeed, is stronger in the lesser, where it makes no show, than in great deeds, which make a parade and attract applause. The only danger with Rhys was that, self-inflated, he might develop an obtrusively dominant will that should override his better qualities. At present his sole desire was to relieve his overburdened mother, and protect his sister and brothers—a worthy and noble aim for a boy of his age.

But a boy reared on a small farm in those primitive days was not the helpless creature progress and modern manners have manufactured between them. Very primitive indeed was Welsh farming in the last century, primitive as the farms themselves. But no child of seven or eight was too young for work of some kind or other, whether reared in the labourer's windowless hut or on the farmer's own wide hearth. If only stone-picking, weeding, or rook-scaring, there was always

something to be done, something to keep active and restless boys and girls out of mischief before they were old enough to drive the cows to pasture, or assist shepherd and husbandman.

Of school-going there was little enough; even dame-schools were as scarce in wild Wales as in rural England; but there was generally a substitute by the fireside, and the man who could not read was far less common in the little Principality than in the larger kingdom.

Still more scarce was the woman or man who could not knit. When a child was six years old, it was time to put knitting-pins into the little fingers to learn the simple stitch. And wander where you would, over the mountains or along the rough roads, you were sure to meet man or maid, on horseback or on foot, stocking-knitting with mechanical precision.

In the long winter evenings, when the only illumination was from the culm fire, the solitary candle, or home-made rushlight, knitting and spinning filled up usefully the darkened hours. And perchance then the big Welsh Bible Dr. Parry had provided for his countrymen a century before would be brought out and laid on the table close to the solitary candle, to be read aloud or spelled out by the growing boy or girl, under paternal instruction. On the Sabbath this was surely so.

Under such training it was clear that Rhys at twelve years of age would be more capable and practically helpful to his mother than a modern farmer's son, who sees the farm only in the holidays, or out of school hours, who handles tennis or cricket bat instead of spade and

pitchfork, and never did a day's hard work in his young life.

When Rhys bravely resolved to work like a man, he knew what lay before him to do and to learn. Farming on a thin, unproductive stratum of soil in a mountain land is no child's play.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

IS there any record of a catastrophe so great or appalling that it could not possibly have been worse?

In the first hours of her sudden bereavement, Mrs. Edwards felt as if an overwhelming flood of desolation had swept over her, and left her and her orphans helpless and hopeless. Not that her husband had been the most active spirit on the farm, but she was in no condition to reason or to weigh probabilities. She had not been wont to rely on him for advice or action, but in losing him she felt as if all was lost.

An apparently small matter roused her to the consciousness that there were depths of misery into which she had not been plunged, and that even out of her affliction she had cause to thank God for sparing a double blow.

When the drowned man had been discovered, he had been bruised and beaten against rocks and stones until his grey frieze coat was torn into shreds and tatters. But it was afterwards found that the old stocking-foot he carried as a money bag had been securely buttoned up in his breeches pocket, and the produce of his

sales at the Friday's market was there intact in hard coin.

In the extremity of her grief for her one great loss she had overlooked the probability of the smaller. Not till the saturated bag was handed to her unopened did she realise what might have been.

As she poured the gold and silver out on her lap, she clasped her hands and fervently thanked God that in His wrath He had remembered mercy.

'I had forgotten that the sheep and goat had been sold to make up the half-year's rent. Yes, indeed I had. And what would become of the farm and the poor children if the rent could not be paid? Pryse, the agent, would turn us out for a better tenant than a poor widow, look you! But he shall see what a woman can do. The good God has not quite forsaken us.'

She wept again at the thought, and little William and Jonet having drawn close to her side questioning her with innocent eyes and tongues, she clasped them both in a close embrace, and, without trusting herself to answer, rose from her wooden stool and carried the recovered coin to a safe hiding-place in the big chest, her sad heart much lightened of its load.

Barefooted David, who was still petticoated — his nine years bringing no title to the dignity of week-day shoes or breeches,—ran with all speed in search of Rhys, to carry the news that a bag of money had been found in his father's pocket, and that his mother was crying over it.

Rhys was just then feeding the pigs in a stone trough,

placed where they were walled in like sheep in a fold. He almost dropped the pail he was emptying, he turned round so sharply.

'Crying? What for?'

''Deed, I think it was about being turned out of the farm,' answered Davy, who had caught the words imperfectly, as he hurried out at the doorway.

Rhys looked aghast. What became of his heroic resolution to work for his brothers and sister if they left the farm?

'Turned out of the farm?' he echoed incredulously. Had not his father and grandfather been born upon it? It would be like tearing up an oak tree by the roots.

''Deed, and she said it,' replied David, as if injured by the doubt.

Down went the empty pail on the stones, and into the house strode Rhys, alternately red and white with excitement.

He could scarcely get the words out, they seemed to choke him. 'Davy says,' he began with a gasp, 'that we are to leave the farm'—he could not bring himself to say 'be turned out.'

'Nay, Rhys, not now I have all the money for the rent, thank God! If that had been lost in the river, I cannot tell what might have happened. There would be no chance of selling cows or pigs, or the oats, or anything before the rent-day, and Mr. Pryse would not wait an hour. "Out you go!" would be his word. "There's a man will give ten guineas more rent for it, and keep the

land in better condition." Yes, look you, he has been saying that these three years, and now it's he will be for saying a woman will not be able to keep the hundred acres and pay my lord his forty pounds. It's poor land, so much rock and bog and wood, and he knows it, so much barren hill-side, scarcely fit to pasture the few sheep and goats. Yes, 'deed it will take hard work to make the farm pay now the husbandman is gone. Ah, yes, yes! We have had a terrible loss, Rhys, *fach*.'[1]

As she spoke the last words the poor widow's tears gushed forth again, and would not be restrained. The flowers she was strewing over the sheet-covered form of her dead fell to the floor, and she dropped on her knees beside the bed, where it was her mournful duty to watch, and hid her face with her hands as if to conceal the passion of grief she could no longer control.

Rhys was sobbing too, though he strove against it in his effort to be manly. His arm went round her heaving shoulders with an unstudied air of natural protection, and in a broken voice he begged her to be calm. Not that he was by any means calm himself, but he was feeling early the need for self-restraint.

'Don't, mother, don't,' he murmured; 'you will be making yourself ill, and then who will mind the farm or the children? I will be a good steady boy, and will work as hard almost as a man. You shall not miss father more than I can help, look you. And sure we have a terrible loss; but, mother dear, it might be worse

[1] *Fach*, equivalent to the English dear.

if we did lose the farm and all, as Davy did say. You are a good farmer, so Owen Griffith do say, and you will be teaching me.'

'Yes, indeed, please God, and you shall be a good farmer too, Rhys,' sobbed she, drying her eyes on her long check apron, and giving him a look of profound trust and loving motherhood, whilst he drew himself up with a renewed sense of importance.

At that moment a figure darkened the bedroom doorway. In stepped a fresh-looking young woman with bare legs and feet, short petticoats of striped flannel, a dark blue woollen cloak, and a man's tall hat worn over a plain linen cap, white as a snowdrop, though the stray locks beneath it might have been more orderly had looking-glasses been more common. She had a bundle on her left arm, a stocking she was knitting in her hand, whilst little Willie held her fast by the other, and Jonet clung to her cloak.

'Ah, Ales,[1] is that you?' burst from Mrs. Edwards with an evident gasp of relief. 'You was not expected back so soon. Had you heard of our loss? Is your poor mother well again?'

'Not quite well, but better, look you. She can sit up, and Mary may manage to do for her now, perhaps.' There was a dubious tone in the 'perhaps,' but she went on to say, 'Mother would not let me stay when she heard of your great trouble, after you was so kind as to let me go away to nurse her. It was not right I should stay at Caerphilly when you was being left all alone by

[1] Ales, pronounced Alis; in English, Alice.

yourself, with nobody to keep watch with you or to help at all;' and she passed into the kitchen as she spoke.

'Yes, *I'm* here, Ales,' thrust in Rhys, as he followed. 'I shall help mother now; yes, indeed!'

'You?' ejaculated Ales incredulously, whilst divesting herself of bundle, cloak, etc. 'Help's a little word and soon said, but it's not much more than the saying we will be getting from you, Rhys. You never was fond of work, whatever!'

Rhys pulled himself up as if insulted. 'You shall see,' he said loftily, and quitted the kitchen, where Mrs. Griffith was paring turnips for dinner, his chin in the air. And not another word did he vouchsafe to the young woman, his mother's hired servant. He might, by his manner, have expected her to understand his altered position and good resolution intuitively, but she only knew him as a lad with more liking for play than work, and expected no more from the present than from the past. Nay, perhaps less, now there was no father to drive him to his daily tasks and thrash him into industry.

It was a time of unusually painful bustle and excitement, yet there was no cheeriness about the daily tasks. Indoors there was a hush even in the scrubbing of benches, tables, and platters, almost in the dash of the churn, for was not the widow still keeping her watch by the dead—the dead who could not be buried on the third day, but must wait until coroner and jury could be called together to verify the cause of Mrs. Edwards' widowhood?

Mrs. Griffith was there, alternately to help Ales with her work, and to relieve the mourner—a kind, motherly sort of woman, one to rely on in emergency.

Out of doors Rhys kept David well employed, telling him he would have to learn to be a man, directing him to do this or that with quite an elder-brotherly air of proprietorship, though not unkindly. Ales wondered what had come to him, he worked about the farm with so much more knowledge of the right thing to be done at the right time than she had given him credit for possessing.

As for poor little Jonet and William, they shrank whispering into corners out of everybody's way, or slunk out into the bit of ground that did duty for a garden, or strayed into the orchard, where they made themselves useful picking up windfall apples for the pony and the pigs, and did their best to make themselves ill by eating the unripe fruit at the same time; for although four years old Jonet was imitative in assuming a protectorate over her two years brother, she had not herself outlived a childish love for the crude and indigestible. They were, fortunately, too young to comprehend the mystery of the closed room, yet the general air of restraint affected even them, as they went about hand in hand.

The valley of the Taff has long been noted for its fertility. It was otherwise in the early years of the last century, when husbandry in Wales was so primitive that the spade did duty for the plough, and crops had to be wrung from exhausted soil wholly by hand-labour;

ignorance, and old prejudice in favour of doing as their fathers had done before them, standing in the way of progress, equally with the paucity of good roads and bridges over which to convey produce.

In places the lowlands near the river were fertile; and where the stream was bordered by lofty slopes, and not hemmed in by precipitous limestone crags, they were clothed with dense woods of fir and mountain ash, oak and beech, with sallows by the water edge, all more esteemed by the sparse population for their timber than for their wondrously picturesque beauty. But at the top of the mountain range eastward of the vale, and on their upper slopes, much of the ground was sour and boggy, and called for more agricultural knowledge and appliances than had found their way thither, even when *this* century was born.

The farm of the Edwardses was so situated on the mountain-side, and certainly enjoyed a diversity of soil capable of development in capable hands. In Eglwysilan parish it was regarded as a fairly large farm, and the house was the envy of the neighbours, though my modern readers may think there was little to envy. It had not only three rooms besides the capacious kitchen, but that kitchen could boast two glazed windows, one on either side the entrance; a very rare distinction, except in good houses or towns, so rare that not even shutters closed the apertures through which air and light found their way to the two sleeping rooms or to the long apartment in the rear, which served a variety of purposes. These were the housing of general stores, household and

farming implements, a passage being kept clear from the kitchen midway through to the back door and farmyard. And this was all the isolation considered necessary for the dairy and dairy utensils, notwithstanding the purpose to which the other half of its space was devoted.

All these separate rooms were upon the ground floor. Stairs were almost unknown conveniences in the cots and farms of wild Wales. Even in the villages few were the inhabitants privileged to look down upon poorer neighbours from upper windows. Lime, however, was plentiful in Glamorganshire, and though walls were put together of roughly hewn stone, they were whitewashed both inside and out with conscientious frequency.

In no place short of a mansion was much furniture to be found. And to say that Mrs. Edwards had a well-scrubbed dresser filled with wooden platters and with mugs of Staffordshire pottery; that she had not only a large oaken table, but a linen cloth to cover it on occasion, and that there was a chair near the chimney corner in addition to the high-backed bench, or settle, and the three-legged stools; that a spinning-wheel stood between the two bedroom doors opposite to the fireplace, and that a large oaken chest stood under one window containing the family stock of clothing, and of flannel the wheel had helped to spin, was to say that she was for her time and place a thrifty, well-to-do woman, somewhat in advance of her class.

However, the great feature of the kitchen was the

expansive open fireplace, where the fire was made on a broad hearthstone, slightly raised, the inside of the chimney, which sloped upwards towards the top like a narrowing funnel, being set with stone seats for the elders of the family.

On the Tuesday following the catastrophe which had made Mrs. Edwards a widow—although all the morning there had been the trampling through of coroner and jurymen—a fierce fire of peat and fire-balls filled the whole of the hearth, and two huge iron pots like witches' cauldrons hung suspended by chains above it, bubbling and steaming. At the same time, in the large oven built into the wall on the right of the fireplace, she and her helpers had been baking spiced cake and oaten bread the whole of the morning, as if providing for a regiment of soldiers.

It was a hot day and hot work, though casements and doors stood open to let out the vaporous fumes of cookery; and had not neighbourly Mrs. Griffith come with her young daughter Cate to the assistance of Ales and her troubled mistress, the former would have been unable to relieve Rhys of his voluntary but fatiguing duty at the remorseless churn, so great, if not unusual, were the preparations for the guests expected on the morrow.

Indeed, as Mrs. Edwards said, she did not know what she could possibly have done without Owen Griffith and his wife, they had been such zealous friends to her in her great affliction.

She was not aware how the man's tender conscience

stung him for leaving Edwards to return home alone from Llantrissant. He was feeling himself in some sort responsible for her bereavement. At any rate, no brother could have served her in better stead had a brother been at hand.

CHAPTER III.

A BOY'S WILL.

AS my story concerns not the dead man, but the family he left behind, I might pass over his burial in silence, had it not been marked by peculiar customs, few traces of which remain. Mountainous and inaccessible regions retain their characteristic traits of life and language long after intercourse has fused together the differing speech and habits of dwellers on the plains, whether city or suburban.

It was the last watch-night, and neither Ales nor her mistress had been in bed for a couple of nights, the girl electing to share the widow's watch beside the closed coffin of her good master, as Rhys would still have done had his careful mother not forbidden.

But long before the grey mists of morning had risen above the tree-tops, or lifted off the mountain-side, Rhys was up and astir with them. There was no leisure for indulgence in grief. There was so much to be done and cleared away before the mournful business of the day began. There were flowers to gather to strew upon the coffin-lid, and carry to the grave. And, if the sheep and cattle out on the hill-side could find pasture for them-

selves, the cows and ewes must be milked, the pigs and poultry fed, or released to feed themselves.

So Rhys and Ales were off betimes, laden with empty pails; bare-legged Ales brushing the dew from the gorse and heather as she trudged along with a pitcher balanced on her head, a stool tucked under one arm, a pail on the other, her knitting, for a wonder, left behind; Rhys, by her side, swinging a large milking-pail to balance a second stool.

When they returned with laden pails to be emptied into the tall churn, the fire was aglow, the porridge ready, the younger children up and dressed in sombre suits, Davy in his first breeches, and all three stiff and uncomfortable in shoes and stockings, neighbourly Mrs. Griffith and her young daughter Cate having come upon the scene to set the afflicted and harassed widow free for the rest of the day.

Owen Griffith was also there, and by the time breakfast was over and a clearance effected, Mrs. Edwards and Rhys had changed their garments and assumed the sable hooded-cloaks prescribed for mourners. Then the table was covered with a clean homespun linen cloth, and re-set with cold beef, cake, and cheese, for all comers, along with mugs to hold the customary draught of hot ale and *abelion*, the latter a spiced decoction of elderberries and herbs, chiefly rosemary, huge pitchers of which were kept piping hot on the hearth.

Meanwhile, Owen Griffith and a companion had improvised a table of planks, and a long bench in front of the house, piling up turf and stones as supports, a

proceeding William watched with wondering interest. He may have puzzled where the mugs and platters came from, and who would sit at the long boards and consume all the beef, the piles of cake, and the great cheeses set out in halves, and what the two empty bowls were for in the middle of each table.

At all events, Jonet wondered, and communicated her perplexity to David, who in turn referred to Rhys, to be answered curtly, 'Wait and see! I'm more puzzled to know what do bring Owen Griffith here, ordering about and as busy as if he was master.'

The mother could have told that a distant cousinship between Griffith and the deceased sufficed for authority to make all needful arrangements in the absence of nearer kin, and that she was extremely grateful to him for his kindness all through the trying time.

Very soon the other children had their questions answered, for guests, bidden or unsought, came trooping in from valley and mountain near and far, not by twos and threes only, but by dozens; relatives, friends, and mere acquaintances, for Edwards was a man held in high esteem. All were in their Sunday best, yet very few had so much as a bit of crape, a black kerchief, or a black pair of stockings. Their presence was supposed a sufficient token of respect.

In succession as they came began, not merely a clatter of subdued voices discussing the sad accident—which might have overtaken any of them — but a general distribution and consumption of cheese, cake, and ale flavoured with the *abelion*, which custom may have

rendered palatable, the simple provisions rapidly disappearing and being replaced as fresh arrivals brought fresh appetites, sharpened by journeying through the keen morning air, and eaten in primitive fashion, each man bringing his own pocket-knife, and converting his bread into a plate to be cut up and eaten with the meat upon it.

And as the widow could not be reasonably expected to provide for so numerous and impromptu a party—*cwrw* being rather an expensive item—each partaker cast a sixpence or other coin into the bowl provided, a proceeding at which the younger children expanded their astonished eyes—all was so strange to them.

Then the crowd, both within and without the house, made way for the bearers with their heavy burden, and for the black-cloaked widow and her two eldest orphans to follow.

On account of their tender years, the roughness and distance of the road to be traversed, it had been decided to leave Jonet and William behind, in care of Ales.

But silent William had had his wondering eyes and ears open the whole of the morning; and no sooner did it dawn on his infantile comprehension that his father was being carried away in the big box, and that his mother and brothers were going away with it, than he insisted on going likewise; clung to his mother's skirts, and held fast, neither amenable to persuasion nor command to release her and remain at home with obedient Jonet.

No! He saw his mother and brothers in tears, and the bearers slowly moving away with the coffin in which

his father was shut up, and in his baby-ignorance he concluded some great wrong was being done. He had been told by Ales that he would never see his father any more, and must have concluded the others were being taken away also; for when he was carried into the house by main force, he fought and struggled in Owen Griffith's strong arms, and cried with dogged persistence, 'Me will go! me shall go!'

Even when shut up close in the bedroom, he kicked at the door and screamed, 'Let me out, let me out: I will go!' until, after a while, the noise ended in a sob and a scuffle, and busy Ales concluded he had wearied himself out and fallen asleep.

When Ales, some quarter of an hour later, opened the door in compliance with Jonet's piteous entreaties, the room was deserted, and William nowhere to be found.

Kicking at the hard door had hurt his toes, in spite of his new shoes, so he turned round to try his heels. On so doing he discovered that the small window-hole was wide open. In another minute he was across the room, scrambling up on to a box lying beneath the narrow aperture in the thick wall, a look of sudden triumph on his determined round face.

He thrust out his head and beheld a long procession winding in and out of the rocky and uneven road, a multitude of high-crowned hats, some atop of women's linen caps, these rising above a medley of red and grey cloaks, striped petticoats and dark jackets crossed with small shawls, mingling with men's grey coats and blue ones; but it did not occur to the child, as it might strike

us, that there was any incongruity in these vari-coloured garments on so solemn an occasion. All to him was new. He had never seen such a concourse of people before; his sole idea was that his mother and his brothers were being borne away after his father, and that he was bound to overtake and bring them back.

The window was not much more than a yard from the ground outside, but it seemed far to so young a child. However, he managed to clamber up in some way, and to drop outside on his feet, and, after a sly glance round to see that the coast was clear, he trotted off as fast as his sturdy little legs would carry him, and out at a narrow gap in the stone wall, which did duty for a gateway; and as the descending procession moved but slowly, and there were occasional stoppages for change of bearers, he contrived to keep the rear of it in sight.

Ere long his wood-soled shoes and stockings chafed and cramped his feet, and he sat down on a wayside stone to remove them. When he looked up, the last hat had disappeared, but, nothing daunted, he set off again at a run, carrying his shoes and stockings in his hands, and ere long caught sight of the nodding hats at a turn of the tortuous road.

He had run nearly a mile, and was getting breathless and footsore, but he went panting forward, with no thought of giving in; but soon he began to call out for some one to stop, and tears ran coursing down his chubby cheeks. Still he trotted on for another half mile or so;

but the pace became slower, the tears ran faster, and when the tail of the procession again disappeared he sobbed aloud, beset with fears.

At this juncture a man leaning over a wall, who had followed the long train with his eyes, caught sight of the woe-begone child, in its black frock, limping painfully along, and asked what he was doing there, and what he was crying for.

The answer was not very coherent or articulate, but the man was sharp as he was good-natured. In a very short time he was out in the road, with William Edwards mounted on a sleek ass, following in the wake of the mourners, who after a short distance on the level began to ascend the lofty hill on the brow of which, like an eagle on its eyrie, stood Eglwysilan's[1] ancient church, with the modest vicarage beside it, isolated from the widely scattered parishioners, and almost inaccessible in foul or wintry weather.

Local tradition assigned to this time-worn edifice a date coeval with the apostles. But suppose we allow the apostles to have slept for nearly three hundred years, and assign to our British St. Helena (or Elian), the church-founding mother of Constantine, the credit of selecting the breezy site for a structure to which she stands sponsor, we still accredit the long-bodied, square-towered, and small-windowed church with a most venerable antiquity, and solid masonry which might make modern architects blush for shame.

No sooner were adventurous William's fears of being

[1] Or, Eglwys-elian.

left behind set at rest by overtaking the slow pedestrians of the long train, than his spirits revived. He began to look about him, and to question the kind cottager, 'What's this?' or, 'What's that?'

Of course he spoke in Welsh, as did all the people. I but render their language into English for my readers.

From his elevated seat he could overlook low walls, and glancing down through the autumnal woods on his left, where the red ash-berries shone temptingly bright against the russet-leaved oak and yellowing beech, caught glimpses here and there of the shining river that had proved so treacherously cruel to his poor father. But neither red berries nor glancing river had such powerful attractions for him as the stupendous pile whence boomed the tolling bell—the 'church' of which he had heard so oft, but never seen.

He had gone with his sister and brothers to the wooded glen which bounded their own farm on the north, there to help, or hinder, the gathering of ash-berries and acorns; but of human habitations he had seen nothing hitherto so large as his own home.

He seemed absolutely fascinated by the grey lichen-covered church, and its low massive square tower, which he took for a huge chimney, and the nearer they drew to it the greater became his absorption.

Being told, in answer to a query, 'People do go there to say prayers,' he asked again, 'Why for? We say prayers at home.' But though the man scratched

his tangled red locks, no adequate reply was forthcoming.

At that moment there was a halt at the arched lych-gate. All the men took off their hats, for the white-robed vicar had come to lead the way into the church.

The boy, who had no hat to remove, could only look on and listen in blank astonishment, understanding nothing of the solemn ceremony, but awed by the mysterious proceedings, and the unfamiliar aspect of the, to him, vast interior.

It was not until he beheld the coffin lowered into the 'big hole' that he screamed out, and was not to be pacified, though Owen Griffith stole gently away from the grave-side and took him in his arms for the second time that day.

The ceremony was soon over, and nothing heard but the sobbing of the mourners and the dropping of small coin into the shovel the sexton held forth for their reception; for thus were the fees of the vicar and himself paid by general contribution, and not merely by the bereaved relatives. It was an old custom, seldom better observed than on this occasion; for of the motley multitude drawn thither to show their esteem for the dead and their sympathy with his family, two-thirds were wofully poor, had travelled far, and lost a day's earnings to be there; but few so poor as to pass the sexton's spade without a tributary coin, however small. Set it, therefore, to their credit, and also that all were decently clad, and flaunted no rags, if they had no crape to

mourn in. Custom is its own law, and respect is not shown by the colour of a coat.

But what of the little fellow who had found his way thither, and created so much consternation by his unseemly interruption?

CHAPTER IV.

PAYING THE RENT.

"DEED to goodness! that boy's rightly named, for he's Will by name and will by nature!' said Ales when the child was brought home, showing no remorse for the trick he had played her, and little but indifference to the chiding of his mother or Rhys.

'Me fought they was take you all away. Me said me would go. Me *did* go!' was all the excuse they could extract from him.

He had made his return home triumphantly on the donkey of his stranger friend, a peat-cutter named Robert Jones, and was not at all disposed for humiliation. On the contrary, he was rather proud of his victory, and excited by his introduction to new scenes.

The man, who was hospitably received and entertained, along with a numerous party of 'cousins,' for whose refection boiled beef and *cwrw da* had been again set out, was quite ready to recount where and how he had picked up the child, and expressed his surprise at the resolute endurance that had carried him so far on a stony, unknown road, no less than the strong affection

which had overpowered the little fellow's natural fears and sense of fatigue or pain.

He repeated with much humour some of the boy's queer questions and sayings, promising to give him another donkey-ride some day. And finally, when taking his departure, Robert Jones patted the boy's brown head, and called him 'a little hero!' as the child ran past with Jonet.

This was not very wise, for the tone of admiration was ill calculated to repress the child's early developed strength of will, or to soothe the ruffled feelings of Rhys on finding his own superlative good conduct apparently unappreciated, and William's wilful disobedience thus applauded.

His chagrin did not escape the notice of the man, who, going round the country as he did, selling peat and culm,[1] had frequent opportunities for the study of human nature.

'Yes, look you,' cried he from the doorway, as he saw a scornful curl on the lip of Rhys, 'your little brother will be greater than any of you some day—head of the house perhaps.'

'He never will. I'm eldest, and then there's Davy. *He's* a baby!' was Rhys' indignant protest.

'A great good man, or a great bad one, Robert Jones?' called out Ales after the turf-cutter, an old acquaintance of hers. She had not forgiven William the fright he had caused by his escapade.

[1] Culm, the dust of hard coal, used for fuel when mixed with clay and peat.

'Indeed, sure, and that depends on what you make of him among you,' the peat-cutter called back over his shoulder, ere he bestrode his donkey and went off.

'The man is right, Jane Edwards,' said Owen Griffith then to the widow; 'there do be great capacities for good or evil in Willem; he will need a firm hand to control him.'

'Ah, sure,' she sighed deeply, her grey eyes filling with tears, 'and now the firm hand is gone.'

'Ah, 'deed for sure! more's the pity!' was echoed round the board.

Rhys alone made no remark; but he set his lips close over his teeth, and tightened his grip on his knife-handle, looking as if he thought *his* hand firm enough to control his baby-brother, and as if *he* meant to curb the wilful little one, whatever others might do. Ales saw it, if the mother did not.

Meanwhile William, unaware of his eldest brother's paternal intentions, was seated under an apple-tree with Jonet, struggling for words to give expression to all the wonders he had seen and heard that day, the 'big house with the big chimney' more than all; whilst Davy, leaning listlessly against the tree trunk, as if fatigued with his long walk, crammed his mouth with bread and cheese, and smiled complacently at the youngster's first impressions of things familiarity had deprived of attraction for him, though over some he looked serious enough.

Five miles away on the south-east from the mountain spur on which the Edwards' family had held a farm for

more than a century, lay, in a broad plain among barren hills, the grand old ruins of Caerphilly Castle, the ancient stronghold of the Despencers, and the very small straggling market town it overshadowed, a town which had either gone to ruin or ceased to grow, since the great castle had been despoiled and tenantless.

It had ceased to be a borough in King Henry VIII.'s time, but still it clung to its fair and market, and thither came farmers and their wives with their produce; miners or their wives, and the servants from the few great houses thereabouts, as buyers. And there, too, came, at stated periods, with his string of pack-horses, the travelling collector of the hand-made goods of the district, such as knitted hosiery, linen checks, woollen shawls, flannels, blankets, all spun and woven in farms and cottages scattered among the mountains. He was the medium between the English merchant and the poor producer, who in the days when there were neither canals nor railroads, nor any facilities for swift conveyance of goods or people, could otherwise have found no market for his wares. As it was, the weaver might probably have obtained better prices at Cardiff, but the miles of extra distance had to be calculated in the reckoning.

Early on the Thursday morning Mrs. Edwards, with a grey duffle[1] cloak over her short black linsey[2] gown, and a black, low-crowned man's hat above her white linen cap, her healthy face pale and worn with the

[1] Duffle, made both in scarlet and grey, was a very thick, close-grained woollen cloth, its upper surface covered with pin-head curly knots. It was almost waterproof.

[2] Linsey-woolsey, a mixture of linen and woollen, is still in use.

agitation of the week, stood by her egg and butter basket, debating whether she should go to the market alone, or yield to the entreaty of Rhys and take him along with her.

It was likewise the rent-day. Mr. Pryse, the noble landowner's steward, condescendingly rode all the way from Cardiff to Caerphilly to meet his lord's tenantry at the little inn, 'The Cross Keys,' and woe betide the poor unfortunate who failed to put in an appearance, or to bring the full quota of coin.

She was in no predicament of that kind, although she felt she might have been; but, hitherto, Edwards had always paid the rent himself, even if she had borne him company, and she rather shrank from her first encounter with the disagreeable agent.

'You had better let me go, mother. Mr. Pryse will find that you are not quite alone, and may be more civil when he sees how big and strong I am, whatever,' urged Rhys.

(Mr. Pryse was a little, wizened, cantankerous fellow, with a skin like shrivelled parchment.)

Ales put in her word. ''Deed, mistress, you had best take the boy. A little stick is better than no stick in a fight.'

Ales had settled the question with this last remark.

'Well, perhaps it's best to be having a witness when you deal with queer folk,' assented her mistress; and Rhys had permission to scuffle off and slip on his black short-tailed jacket and breeches, so as to look his best and bravest. He was a sturdy, well-grown lad for his

years, with a firm chin and fearless grey eyes, and whether it was fancy or reality his mother thought him taller in his new clothes.

He certainly was developing rapidly; for no sooner was the shaggy pony jogging along with its double load Mrs. Edwards in front with her basket resting on a bag of wool she had combed and spun, than he begun to expatiate on the necessity there was now for him to learn how to go to market, and buy and sell, if he was to be a real help to her. He 'could not be learning too much or too soon,' he said, and was not contradicted, though a week earlier she would have laughed at him.

The road wound in and out among the hills, where the abundant waxen blossoms of the cross-leaved heath were fast losing their delicate blush and fading with the season, and the rosettes of the sundew had forgotten their dead florets a month or more. The very bracken was turning brown and husky, and the roadway was strewed with yellow and russet leaves that were whirled hither and thither by the wind or were trodden into the earth by unrelenting hoofs.

For it was also the first October fair, and there was no lack of company by the way. Owen Griffith, farmer and weaver, had joined them early with a great pack of flannel across his mare; and from almost every fold of the hills came one or more on foot or horseback to swell the general stream, every one, male or female, knitting along the road. The grimy collier and the swart digger of tin and iron hailed each other by the way, and the widow had many a respectful salutation as they jogged

along, and answered many an inquiry about the boy behind her.

Her first business when they reached Caerphilly was to get over her ordeal with Mr. Pryse, Griffith kindly taking charge of her horse and commodities.

The narrow entrance to the inn was crowded with tenants on their way to the important deputy's room or from it, but all were ready with natural politeness to make way for William Edwards' widow. Mr. Pryse might have taken a lesson from men of lesser degree.

From the table by the window where he sat, with an inkhorn and papers before him, small piles of coin at his right hand, he looked up.

Rhys had taken off his hat; the steward, to assert his superiority, kept his upon his head.

'So I hear you're a widow, Mrs. Edwards,' was his abrupt salutation. 'The farmer could not see his way home, I'm told, and so got drowned. Blind drunk, I suppose?' A supercilious lift of his narrow shoulders emphasised his brutal comment.

Rhys flamed up. 'No, sir; my father *never* got drunk. He could not see for the mist, and the flood carried him away. If he had been drunk, sir, he could not have crossed the Rhonda ford.'

If Mrs. Edwards had been shocked by the steward's unfeeling rudeness, now she feared her farm was in peril, and began to wish she had left Rhys outside.

With half-shut eyes, Mr. Pryse scanned the impetuous boy from head to foot curiously. Ignoring the

warm defence of a dead father, he drew his sinister brows together, and asked curtly—

'That your son?'

''Deed, yes, sir.'

'How old is he?'

'Twelve last March, sir.'

An unpleasant smile thinned the thin lips that asked again—

'Your eldest?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Humph! And do you expect to manage the farm with only *his* help?'

'Not altogether, sir. I've'—

'What?' he interrupted. 'Come to give it up?'

'*No*,' said the widow firmly. 'I have come to pay the rent. I can hire a man. But *I* shall be the farmer, please God.'

She counted out the money on the table as she spoke, the fire in her eyes burning up the tears.

'And what sort of a farmer will *you* make?' he replied with a sneer. 'You'd better give up the holding at once.'

'You'd better wait and see, sir. When I cannot pay the rent I may give in, not before. I am wanting the receipt, look you.'

'Humph! Oh, ah, the receipt, sure!'

Had he counted on her being so ignorant, or simple, or careless as to pay rent and take no receipt, his quill pen went squeaking over the paper so reluctantly? At all events he watched her narrowly through his

slits of eyes as she took it up and read it carefully over, before she folded it up and stowed it away in her needle-book for safe carriage in her capacious pocket.

He was not quite so confident of her incapacity for management when she left with a brief 'Good-morning,' and was followed by her son, who put on his hat and said never a word. He was wise, for if he had said anything there would have been unpleasantness.

So there would have been had he heard the growl that followed them. 'Humph! the young cub's as hot and unmannerly as his pig-headed lout of a father! but he'll get his nails cut when the widow marries again, indeed will he.'

'Mother, does Mr. Pryse ever cheat any one? I don't think he wanted you to have that receipt you had to be asking for,' whispered Rhys when they got outside. 'I felt as if I'd like to knock him down, 'deed I did.'

'Hush, Rhys,' and the widow looked round, afraid of listeners; 'you must not say that. He's a very hard man, and nobody does be liking him much, but I never heard of his really cheating any one. You must be very careful not to offend him. Your poor father did it once, and he has owed us a grudge ever since.'

'Then he is a bad man, and I shall hate him for the wicked words he said of father.'

Owen Griffith was waiting, and brief was the widow's opportunity to impress on Rhys the sin and danger of fostering hatred. As brief was the influence on him.

Mr. Pryse, apart from the insult to his father's memory, had touched the sensitive nerve of his own sprouting self-sufficiency, and shown, so the boy thought, a tendency to overreach his mother; and, without any analysis of his own motives, Rhys had conceived on the spot an unconquerable aversion to the unprepossessing steward.

When Owen Griffith's turn came, Mr. Pryse was, for him, unusually bland and gracious, much interested in his small holding and the welfare of his family, and *incidentally* interested in his near neighbours, the family so suddenly deprived of its head. But though he passed the weaving farmer through a very fine sieve, he got nothing for his pains that could be laid up against either the drowned man or the capable widow.

So capable, that she had disposed of her wool, her butter and eggs, sold a quantity of oats from a sample, hired a trustworthy young man named Evan Evans for the farm, made her own purchases, called to see the rheumatic mother of Ales, who lived in a small cot built within the very ruins of the castle, exchanged messages and Christian sympathy with the old dame, and was refreshed and ready for her return home with Rhys long before Owen or his friends thought of stirring.

And home they got whilst there was light to pick their way, though clouds had been gathering in the south-west, and the first drops of a heavy downpour caught them as they neared the farm. They were welcomed by the joyous shouts of the little ones, and the assurance of Ales that they had all of them been 'as

good as gold,' and well deserved the gingerbread brought home for them. Even William, of whom there had been some doubts, accepted the 'going to market' as a common occurrence, and had given her very little trouble, though he had exacted a promise that she would take him some day to see 'the great big house, with the big chimney, that they called the church.'

CHAPTER V.

THE NEW INMATE.

THE rain was still coming down with steady persistence when, two hours later, Evan Evans lifted the great wooden latch of Brookside Farm, and entered the large kitchen with a 'God save you' for greeting.

Ales, who was giving the last stir to something bubbling in an iron pot on the fire, whence came a steaming savour of leeks, turned round sharply to see what sort of a young fellow had come into the house as an inmate, and seeing, returned his salutation, as did the two lads waiting for their supper.

What she saw was a strong-limbed young man, about three or four and twenty, with a good-humoured smile upon his face, as if a drenched coat and muddy nether garments were quite minor discomforts. He carried a lighted lanthorn in one hand, and a bundle slung on a stick over his shoulder.

'If you're Evan Evans,' said she, 'you'd best take off your coat, and sit down by the fire to get dry,' a corresponding smile on her face sufficing for a welcome, and indicating her content with the sample as presented.

As if to ensure her good graces, his first act was to step across the floor, and with one strong brown hand lift from the chimney-hook the heavy broth-pot, on the handle of which the girl had just laid both of hers.

'Good for you, Evan Evans; may you be always as ready,' said she, showing her firm white teeth, and hastening to ladle out the broth the boiled beef had supplied.

'Always ready for a good supper,' was the prompt reply. 'One does not always get broth every day.'

Meat was not often boiled for broth then on small farms. Indeed, was never cooked except on rare occasions.

At that moment Mrs. Edwards came in from what we may call the 'dairy' in the rear.

'I did not expect you to-night,' said she, 'but it is well you are here.'

'Sure and indeed, ma'am, you would not have me come on a Friday, and I was not myself like to come on a Saturday, and I thought you would want me before the Monday, look you.'

'Why not Saturday?' interrupted Rhys, waiting impatiently for his broth.

'Sure and "Saturday's flitting is a short sitting" my Irish grandmother was used to say, and she was a wise woman,' answered the young man gravely.

Superstition was so widespread and general, that no one uttered a word of doubt or dissent to either proposition, but Mrs. Edwards remarked, ''Deed and it's

quite as well you came. We have lost a week, and it's time some of the roots was out of the ground. It will be soft for the digging after the rain.'

'Do you be having any potatoes among your crops?' he asked then over his steaming bowl of thick broth.

''Deed, no; Edwards' (a sigh) 'said they was only for the gentry to grow in their gardens.'

'Then I would have you try them next year. The head man at Castella says they was the most profitable crop he had on the land. They was good for the cows and the hogs if he had any to spare from the family table. He was be going to plough half an acre of ground for them.'

'Plough? What's that?' questioned Rhys, to whom the very word was unknown.

Evan explained to more than one attentive listener.

'Ah, well,' said Mrs. Edwards, when he had done. 'Where I was in England, every farmer did plough his fields. And my own father used to be saying that the laws King Howel the Good did be making nearly eight hundred years ago, would not allow any man to be a farmer unless he could make his own plough, as well as guide it. But there did be only wooden ploughs in those days, and they did get knocked to bits on the stony ground among the mountains of wild Wales, and they did get out of use, whatever. I did want to have a good strong plough here, but Edwards was always be saying the spade was good enough for him. His father and his grandfather before him

had dug every rood of the land with the spade, and what was good enough for them was good enough for him.'

'Good enough's all very well where there's never a better,' thrust in go-ahead Ales, with the freedom of the time. 'You didn't be thinking your grandmother's distaff good enough for you when you bought that spinning-wheel.'

Both Evan and Rhys looked up from their half-empty bowls across the table at Ales, as if struck by her pertinent shrewdness.

'Indeed, Ales, I did not; nor did I think holes that let in the wind and weather along with the light good enough. But till the grandfather did die of rheumatics there could be no glass windows. And I did not think it good for the pigs to run loose, rooting up my garden and destroying what they could not eat, but there has never been a sty built to this day.'

'And what's a sty?' asked Rhys.

'A house for the hogs.'

Rhys laughed. 'Why, mother, who ever did see pigs with a house of their own? All pigs run loose in the woods. Lewis did say to me he never saw any but ours shut up in a fold like sheep.'

'Never mind Lewis. He has never gone far from Eglwysilan. If he had been in England as I was before I married, he would have been seeing pig-styes on every farm. But there be plenty in Wales, and Evan will set up one here very soon.'

'Yes, indeed,' was the man's hearty response.

There was some further talk over work to be done, and how it was to be done, before Evan followed Rhys to bed, neither having a word to say against overcrowding, although David was there before them.

And then Mrs. Edwards and Ales, comparing notes, agreed that she had hired a very capable man.

It might have been said with equal propriety that the widow had shown her own capability in the choice of a farm-servant who would live in close companionship with her fatherless sons.

Over the board set forth with funeral meats she had named her want among the assembled relatives, and then had ensued a warm controversy on the merits of various men likely to be at the Caerphilly hirings.

Some one had named Evan Evans. Thereupon arose a general outcry that he would ruin the farm with the notions he had picked up at Castella, where there was an English farm-bailiff. It was admitted that he was hard-working, honest, sober, and religious, but all these were as dust in the balance compared with the crime of departing from the old ways, and preferring new methods of husbandry.

She had listened, making no comments. But she had hired the young fellow the more readily for those very detractions. She had not found the old ways pleasant or profitable. She meant to show Mr. Pryse what good farming could do for but indifferent land.

And she counted on Evan's religious principles as warrants for the example he would set before her growing boys.

The hiring was for the year, and could only be terminated by mutual agreement. At the same time it was renewable from year to year, and sometimes both men and maids remained with the same master or mistress half their lives. If any breach of contract occurred, the law was very strict and severe. A prison awaited the servant absent without leave, or wilfully refractory, and heavy fines the masters who ill-treated the servants so hired. Such cases were not frequent, but they did occur at intervals.

Though the sky was clear, the rain was still dripping from the eaves, and had worn little runnels in the soil and between the grey stones on its way down hill to swell the noisy woodland brook, when Evan and the boys turned out of their close and darkened bedroom in the morning, and Rhys volunteered to show the former over the farm before the others were up.

'Deed, no,' said the man, 'that do be your mother's place. She might not be liking us to make so free, whatever. We can make up the fire, and set on the porridge-pot for Ales, to lose no time. Where are the fire-balls kept?'

This was a check to the boy's newly-born importance. Not choosing to wait upon the man, he ordered Davy to fetch the fire-balls, and marched out at the back in some dudgeon. Meanwhile, bidable Davy brought the fire-balls. Evan, all unconscious of the young master's

wounded dignity, fanned the smouldering peat on the hearth to a glow, and had a clear fire under the black pot when Ales and her mistress came upon the scene, leaving Jonet and William still asleep.

The morning ablutions of Evan and the two elder boys were performed in the open air, at a spring which gushed from the stony mountain-side into a natural water-worn basin; Mrs. Edwards and Ales in the nondescript apartment in the rear, there being little time or ceremony wasted in the operation.

The rough-and-ready toilette completed, Ales went back to the kitchen; and the sun having just risen above the mountain-top to waken up bird and beast, and turn the lingering rain-drops into fairy gems, Mrs. Edwards herself led Evan over the primitive homestead, from the rude stabling and cowshed, where the fowls roosted overhead, to the dilapidated thing they called a barn, and the sodden farmyard, where a huge sow and her brood of piglings lay wallowing in the mire.

Two years earlier the young man would have looked on all with complacency as the common state of things; but then he could only shake his head and coincide with his new mistress that there was room for improvements that would require time, energy, and some outlay. They had looked into the orchard, and at the stone fences, and, the survey over, came in at the front, where Mrs. Edwards had done her ineffectual best to copy an English garden for herbs and flowers, and to keep out pigs, poultry, and goats.

By this time Ales and offended Rhys were back from milking, the two little ones were washed and dressed, and the porridge was ready for pouring out, quiet Davy having lent a hand wherever needed, without any fuss or assumption. He was always ready to fetch and carry at any one's bidding, and was seldom allowed to sit still. It was he who had brought water from the spring to wash the younger ones, and emptied it when used; he who had laid wooden bowls and spoons on the table and brought in the great brown pitcher of milk, and was lifting William to his seat at the table when his mother and Evan came in at the door. Just docile Davy, of whom nobody made much account either to praise or blame.

Rhys, who had not yet recovered his composure, had already taken his seat at the table in silent displeasure, and took no note of their entrance, but both Jonet and William stared hard at the strange man, the former shyly, the latter with open-mouthed wonder, which he put into words.

'Who's 'oo?' he wanted to know when Evan drew his stool to the table beside him.

Being answered pleasantly, he rained childish questions thick and fast on the 'strange man,' all relative to his presence there, and was barely silenced when grace was said over the hot porridge. There had been so many strange men coming and going in the past week that he wondered if Evan had been left behind. His queries only ceased with a scalded mouth.

'If you want to learn farming, Rhys, you had better

come with Evan and me. We are going over the fields to settle what is best to be done,' said his mother when breakfast was over.

Had his mother asked him to go along with *her* to settle what had best to be done, and how, he would have risen with alacrity to share her cares and counsels, but much as he had professed his desire to learn he did not want Evan Evans for a teacher. Had not his interest and curiosity been excited overnight, he might have lingered behind, so sore was he from the morning's rebuff. As it was he rose but sullenly to obey.

'May I come?' asked Davy.

''Deed, no. You will be wanted here. Get your knitting and mind Jonet and Willem.'

The peremptory reply served for both Davy and Jonet, though the latter did put a pouting finger to her lips. But William had ideas and a will of his own.

'Me go with 'oo!' 'Me must go!' 'Me *will* go!' 'Man, take me!' were his persistent iterations, while his sturdy bare legs and feet went pattering after his elders over the rain-washed stones, and he struggled with all his little might against the attempts of Rhys to force him back.

Their wills were equally strong, but their strength was not. No doubt Rhys clutched the tender arms too tightly, for William screamed and cried out—

''Oo hurt me; 'oo hurt me.'

Evan, who had reached the gateway with Mrs.

Edwards, turned back, saying pitifully, 'Don't be hurting the little man. If your mother do be willing to let him go, I will carry him on my shoulders, look you.'

In another minute, triumphantly, masterful William was mounted on the low stone wall, on his way to the big man's shoulders, his mother smiling a passive consent, whilst Rhys bit his under lip and clenched his hands tightly in ill-concealed chagrin.

It was the second time that morning Evan Evans, the hired man, had thwarted him, his father's first-born. Rhys, in his own opinion, had ceased to be a boy. He had quite decided that he was to be his mother's right-hand man, and that they would manage the farm between them, with underlings of course, and here was this great interloper come and thrusting him into the background.

It was with no good will he followed over grass land and arable, over the fallow and on to the high moorland, where the cows ruminated among the tall grasses, and the sheep nibbled close to the ground the sweet morsels the cows had left, and the omnivorous goats browsed on heather or anything else in the way of vegetation. He heard them talk of the carrots and other roots to be dug up and housed at once, of the lime and farm manure to be laid on this field or that, and the suitable crops to be raised; but though he had a crude perception that Evan was a better farmer than his father, he sullenly resented the change in contemplation. All the more, perhaps, because his mother called for his attention, with

MOUNTED ON THE LOW WALL, ON HIS WAY TO EVAN'S SHOULDERS.—*See page* 66.

'You hear this, Rhys?' 'Yes, Rhys; indeed, that will be best.'

He gloomed, whilst William, released from his perch, ran hither and thither in high glee, chasing away the rooks and water-wagtails that were, unsuspectedly, doing the farmer good service.

CHAPTER VI.

LOST.

IT is difficult in these days of chemistry, steam, and mechanical contrivances for reducing labour — if not for dispensing with it altogether — to realise the difficulties attending the farmer in wild mountainous districts, far removed from the centres of civilisation, and unacquainted with the agricultural implements and appliances even then in use in more favoured districts. Places where there were no carts and no proper roads, and where the ascents and descents were too abrupt for anything but a biped or a mule; where every acre of the cultivated mountain or moorland had to be turned over with the spade, and every particle of manure laid on the land had to be carried thither in baskets strapped on human shoulders, or in panniers borne by ass or mule.

Yet, such were the difficulties Mrs. Edwards and other Welsh farmers had to contend with even up to the present century, the moorland farmers of Cumberland and the North-West Riding of Yorkshire being somewhat similarly situated.

The loss of a whole week's labour at the beginning of October was a serious detriment. Even Rhys knew that,

and finding that he was to take his instructions from his mother and not from Evan, he smothered his ill-humour and buckled to in earnest, though his brows contracted when a new form of labour was suggested to him.

'Rhys, do you think you could cut down the bracken at the edge of the wood?' asked his mother dubiously.

'Yes, surely, I can cut it. Did I not help to reap the oats? But why should it be cut?'

'Evan says it will save straw in the farmyard, and should be stacked for bedding for the pigs and cattle before it do be too late. And after it has served the beasts, it will be better for some of the land than lime.'

''Deed, an' Evan do seem mighty clever! Houses and bedding for pigs indeed!'

Yes, indeed, Rhys, and I am not too proud or too old to learn from him. Please God, he will be helping us to keep the farm in spite of Mr. Pryse.'

Not another word of scorn fell from the boy's lips.

Bidding Lewis, the shepherd's son, follow with Breint, the pony, to carry home the fern, as instructed by his mother, he, with a sickle over his arm, took his way across a grassy slope towards the steep woodland, stepping alongside the musical runnel the gushing hill-side spring sent, as overflow from a huge stone trough or basin, across the land and down the incline to join the tumbling brook from which the farm derived its name. The tawny brook itself had its source high up in the peaty moss on the mountain-top, and had worn, or found, a channel in a narrow cleft between precipitous rocks,

whose seamy sides barely afforded foothold for fir and larch. Yet widening and deepening into a picturesque glen, the ash and the elder hung out their red or purple-black berries over the noisy and tumbling watercourse, and the sturdy trunks of oak and beech uprose and spread out leafy arms to shade it from the too intrusive westering sun, dropping in a ripe acorn or a triangular nut quietly now and then, to float away and fructify in a future season far from the parent tree.

It was otherwise when the wild north-east winds came rushing and roaring down the glen, for then ripe or unripe acorns and prickly mast were torn rudely away along with shoals of russet leaves and flung to the ground as offerings to the hogs and omnivorous goats, the brook coming in for its share, as well as the fringe of feathery ferns.

The larger portion of the farm lands were on the steep but undulating uplands above the white homestead, the more fertile, including the orchard and the garden-plot, lying below.

Bordered on either side by rough stone fences, and separating the grass land from these, a wider well-trodden path or road, which the flaky character of the stony ground converted into a natural succession of broad shallow steps, trended obliquely from the house to the level or main road such as it was. Across this, some two hundred yards farther north, the simple brook spread itself out and chafed at the stepping-stones which barred its passage to deeper woods and the great river that would swallow it up. Just as some thoughtless youth

rushes from the safe shelter of a home too narrow for his ambition, and plunging into the vortex of the untried world is lost for ever.

Some thirty or forty paces beyond the shallow brook stood the low cottage of Owen Griffith, whitewashed like the larger farm above. Then the lane took a turn and was crossed by intersecting roads perplexing to strange travellers.

The outskirts of a flourishing and busy town now cover much of the land I have described so carefully. Even the lanes and highways have undergone changes since the Edwardses held Brookside Farm and traversed them.

On that sunny October forenoon, while Rhys and Lewis cut down fern on the borders of the wood, and Evan plied his spade to turn over the stubble in good furrows higher up the hill, Mrs. Edwards midway, like a true Welsh farmer's wife, resolutely dug up the long-rooted, tenacious carrots, sparing not her toil, whilst Davy (again in petticoats) and even four-year-old Jonet freed them from the loosened earth, and cast them into wicker baskets for Ales to carry from the field to the barn, poised on her head. The basket was not light when full, but she stepped along with ease and grace, knitting as she went or came, only tucking the rapidly increasing stocking in her girdling apron-string whilst she emptied her load, or changed an empty basket for a full one.

At first, imitative William insisted on helping, or hindering, Davy and Jonet, and for a while was as busy

as the rest. Then he began to trot beside Ales as she went to and fro. After a time the little bare legs grew weary, and when the toilers rested on upturned baskets to take their noontide meal of oaten cake and buttermilk, he was almost too sleepy to eat or drink, and, resting his sunny head against his mother's knee, fell off into a doze.

Seeing that, Ales promptly lifted him up in her strong arms, and, carrying him to the farm, laid him on his mother's bed and left him there, as she thought, secure from harm.

Once or twice, after emptying her baskets in the barn, she came down to the house and found him sleeping peacefully. So an hour and a half must have slipped by, perhaps more, when turning in to look at her charge, she found the room vacant.

Still, she was beset by no apprehensions of ill. She made up the smouldering fire, and did one or two little household matters before she went back to the field with her empty basket, nothing doubting but she would find the boy with his mother. He knew his way about the farm.

'Is not Willem with you?' she cried out as she neared the group in the field. 'He is not in bed.'

'Not in bed?' echoed his mother, but without alarm. ''Deed then, he will have gone to Evan or to Rhys. That will be it. He will have met Lewis with the pony, and got a ride in one of the empty panniers.'

'Sure, and that's most like.'

But on her next journey to the barn she saw Lewis

bringing up the pony laden with the panniers of bracken, but no child. Hastily ridding herself of her load, she waited until he came near. Then she called out—

'Have you seen Willem?'

''Deed, no! Is he lost again?' came back in reply.

'Lost? Name o' goodness, I hope not! Mistress will go distracted if he is. Empty your bracken, and keep a look-out; I'm off up the hill to Evan.'

And away she sped at flying speed, straight as an arrow, over field and fallow. Her heart sank as she came in sight of Evan digging away as if his life depended on his day's labour, companioned only by feathered searchers for the worms he brought to light.

'Evan!' she screamed, affrighted at last, 'have you seen Willem? We cannot find him anywhere, whatever.'

Down went the man's spade, and over the freshly-turned ground he came bounding, in spite of his wooden-soled shoes. 'You don't mean to say the child is lost?' he cried.

But she was already running back to her mistress, who took the alarm as soon as they came in sight, and clasping her hands in sudden terror, shrieked out, 'Oh, what is it? What has happened to my boy? Where is my darling Willem? Oh, if I lose him too, I shall go crazy!'

Her only thought was that the child, in seeking Rhys, had fallen over a rock and been killed.

Her shriek, her unbidden tears, communicated her fright to Jonet and Davy, who clung to her skirts and cried for companionship, Jonet hardly knew why.

There was a general rush to meet Rhys.

'Sure, he will be in the orchard,' said he confidently.

But he was not in the orchard, not anywhere on the farm.

''Deed, and I think he will be for going to the church,' put in Davy. 'He wanted to be going yesterday, look you!'

The idea was instantly caught up. Evan and Rhys were off in search, and Lewis after them. Ales in vain endeavoured to persuade the mother to remain behind, whilst she went up to the moor, to see if he had strayed thither after the sheep. 'Don't fret,' she said, 'they are certain to be bringing him back soon. His little legs would not carry him far.'

'Oh, Ales,' expostulated her mistress, 'how can you ask me to sit still while my darling Willem may be dead or in danger?'

'Mother,' said Davy, with a gulp to swallow a sob, 'I will stay and take care of Jonet if you both go You will be good with me, won't you, Jonet?'

'Yes, indeed,' replied the little girl, as his arm stole protectingly round her shoulders, and he kissed her tear-stained face, 'I will be very good.'

So, with strong injunctions not to go away, the two children were left alone in the house, with only a grey cat and a rough dog to bear them company.

At first they sat still and waited expectantly, clinging

to each other. Then the silence and solitude became oppressive. Presently Jonet began to cry for her missing playfellow, and when brave-hearted Davy failed to console her, his own tears began to fall. A dreadful fear began to creep over him lest William should be lost like his father, and they might never see him again. How long the time did seem to those two children left alone with a new fear!

Ales was the first to return. She found the two seated on the stone stile in front that commanded a view of the steep path, anxiously and with beating hearts watching for some one to come.

She brought them no good news, and was off again with stool and pail, for the cows were lowing to be milked. But her very coming had broken up the dreary silence and monotony. And when she went she left them milk and cake, and the consciousness she was not far away. Then, at her suggestion, Davy began to teach Jonet to knit, and in the occupation time passed less painfully.

Ales came back with her milk-pails, and commended them for being good; made up the fire and set on the pot for supper. And so long as the setting sun shone redly in through door and windows they were passive, and she bustled about her household affairs, hiding her own fears.

But the sun set, and dusk came down, yet never a foot came near the farm to say the boy was found.

Then Evan came up for lanthorns to renew the search. He said he had been to the very church gates,

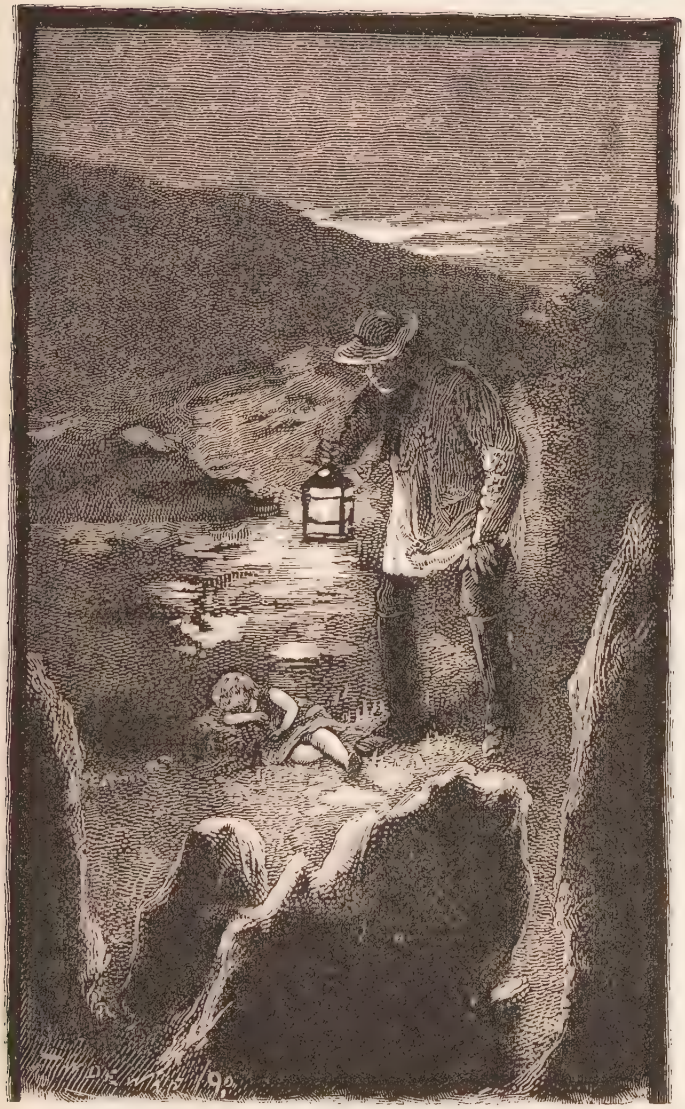
but could find no trace of the child. Owen Griffith had left his loom, and his wife had kept watch to give each returning seeker news of the others. Mrs. Edwards was then at the weaver's in pitiable distress, and Rhys rushing hither and thither almost as wild.

The two children, unwilling to go to bed, had fallen asleep huddled together in the chimney corner, when, between nine and ten o'clock, restless Ales thought she heard a shout, and before she could get to the door in burst Rhys, crying out, 'He is found! he is found!' and close at his heels came Evan with the poor wanderer in his arms, limp and helpless, his hair and his clothes saturated with heavy dew or mist, his little bare feet cut and bleeding, his lips and hands stained with the juice of purple berries.

The woods and every possible nook and corner seemed to have been explored, when Evan chanced to question a young man upon the Merthyr Road. The stupid fellow stared vacantly, then blundered out, ''Deed, an' sure I did hear something about an hour ago up by the Druid Stones, but I took it for a stray lamb bleating for the ewe.'

'Well, sure, and it *might* be a child crying. I didn't go to see,' he replied stupidly to a second question.

Evan stopped to hear no more. Without seeking a regular path, he made his way through bush and bramble, over rock and hollow, and there in the very midst of the hoary circle of lichen-covered grey stones, which seemed to sentinel him round in upright double file, the light of the lanthorn revealed the child lying



LYING IN THE MIDST OF THE HOARY CIRCLE OF GREY STONES.—*See page* 78.

in a heap under the overhanging shadow of the great rocking-stone, his head pillowed on the arm that rested against its conical base. Had the child mistaken those grey stones for the upright slabs in the churchyard?

The first rejoicing over, and the boy in bed, Rhys and Ales were both of opinion that he should be 'well whipped in the morning to teach him better than to put people in such frights.' And no doubt Evan was of the same mind, though he made no remark.

But the tender-hearted mother could only thank God for his restoration, and say that he had punished himself quite sufficiently. He was not likely to stray again.

Not for some time, for though all his garments were woollen, as were those of his elders, the damp, the exposure, no less than his childish terror, laid him up with a feverish illness that lasted for weeks.

As well as could be made out from his disjointed confession, Davy's conjecture had been the true one.

He had wakened, found himself alone, and had set off to 'see the big church,' nothing doubting he should find Robert Jones and his donkey to help him on his way. He had gone splashing through the shallow brook, and past Owen Griffith's unseen, but when he came to the bisecting roads his memory failed; he hesitated, turned to the right instead of the left, trudged on manfully northward, then took a by-path up-hill, as he fancied to the church, got bewildered among walls and winding ways, and out on the wild moor, stopping here and there to rest or gather blackberries, for he was

growing both weary and hungry. But he never felt the solitude oppressive whilst there was a bird or a stray sheep about. And it was not until the dusk began to gather and he sank utterly exhausted under the great rocking-stone, that his courage forsook him, and he cried piteously in his hungry loneliness and desolation, cried himself into the insensibility of sleep, with only night and the everlasting arms around him.

In losing himself had he lost his childish craving to see once more that wonder of wonders—the big church?

CHAPTER VII.

THE YOUNG PLAGUE.

THANKFUL as was Mrs. Edwards, the mother, for the restoration of her missing darling; as a farmer, sorely behind with the autumnal field-work, the loss of half a day's labour to every useful hand upon the farm chafed her no less than it irritated Rhys. But when the child was absolutely ill, and required careful nursing or watching, she was torn with a double anxiety. The life of her child was at stake, and so was her possession of the farm. There was so much to be done before November set in, and so few hands to accomplish all. The outdoor work could not be neglected, or the live stock and the crops would suffer. Yet *some one must* remain indoors to watch the child, restless with fever. Davy was willing, but Davy was too young, and lacked strength to overcome resistance to nauseous draughts.

She was at her wits' end; could not neglect her child, dared not neglect her farm.

In this emergency, Rhys made a suggestion that Mrs. Griffith might perhaps be willing to spare her daughter Cate, a stout, red-haired, good-looking lass about his own

age, who had already shown her active ability to make herself useful.

After some slight hesitation on the part of the girl's mother, it was agreed that Cate should be at the farm early every morning, provided she returned home in the evenings before nightfall. Her temporary services were to be repaid with cheese made from the mixed milk of cows and ewes, or other farm produce, a customary mode of payment for casual service.

Owen had suggested to his wife that the farm would be a good school for their girl. She would see things done there, both by Mrs. Edwards and Ales, that she had no chance of seeing at home, and she could have no better training for future service.

The girl proved quite an acquisition. She was just as willing as Davy, and more efficient. When not wanted beside William, she was ready to relieve Ales at the churn or the scouring of pots and pails. Then she had a fairly good temper and persuasive ways that made her a capital nurse for a sick child with a resolute will.

Jonet took to her amazingly. She brought some pieces of striped flannel, the refuse of her father's loom, and dressed up the little one's wooden doll like a real Welsh-woman. And she brought green rushes from the brook-side, and wove toy-baskets for her.

Or, while Davy was away in the fields filling baskets with freshly-dug roots, or clearing the ground of stones (which many farmers in those days believed to *grow*, just as surely as weeds), and Jonet was ready to whimper

for a playfellow, she would set down her knitting, or other work, to play at cat's cradle or push-pins; and, finding that Davy had tried to teach the little fingers to knit, she cast on stitches for a doll's belt, and, with a little patience on both sides, the feat was accomplished, and Jonet wonderfully proud of her new acquirement.

By thus amusing the healthy child longing for a romp, she preserved quiet by the bedside of the sick one, whom an apothecary, brought all the way from Caerphilly, pronounced 'in a critical state.'

Mrs. Edwards, anxiously coming and going, saw what a capital nurse she made, and judged she was of better use there than in the fields. Rhys, too, would put his head in through the open window now and then to ask how his brother was getting on, and satisfied himself that he had shown his discernment in suggesting Cate to his mother.

And when William began to recover, which was not until November had well set in, no one was more willing to admit her obligations to the girl than was Jane Edwards. Nay, she went so far as to send Rhys to light Cate home when the shortening of the days caused her to be kept after dark, and Rhys never raised any objection.

She had helped him on her first coming to strip the apple and pear trees of their late fruit, and to separate such as were to be saved for the market from those to be thrown into the mash-tub and crushed for cider. And on the first day that William was allowed to sit at an open door, he watched her and Rhys preparing the

winter store of fire-balls, so willing was she to help in any way. Propped up in bed, he had seen Robert Jones once or twice lead a mule and an ass up the steep path with heavily-laden barrels slung across; but though he called faintly to the man through the open window, and was as usual inquisitive, he was little wiser when told they 'brought culm and clay for fire-balls.'

Fire-balls were familiar things. Not so the culm or the clay, and to satisfy his persistent curiosity he was promised if he would keep quiet he should witness their conversion into the hard balls.

A few yards from the house he saw on one side a great heap of black dust (the refuse of hard coal). This, barefooted Cate was riddling through a wire sieve (the very sieve Breint had brought safely home, though he lost the buyer), flinging away into a separate heap all that was too coarse to pass through the sieve. At a distance on the other side was laid a quantity of yellow clay, portions of which Rhys was moistening with water, beating and turning over with a spade, and when of the proper consistence adding, a spadeful at a time, the fine black dust Cate had sieved, to be again mixed and kneaded like dough, and finally worked with the hands into round hard balls, which he set aside to dry for fuel.

The eagerness with which the pale little adventurer watched these grimy processes, his questions and quaint remarks, quite amused the two workers, but his searching interrogations speedily posed both of them; and when he wanted to know what *was* coal, and what was

clay, and why they mixed the two together to make them burn, he was greeted with fresh laughter, and an impatient, 'Oh, don't bother,' or its Welsh equivalent, from Rhys.

But the little inquirer, who sat with his head on one side, resting it on his hand, was not contented with the put-off; and when Robert Jones came with a load of peat that afternoon, he was plied with the same questions.

The man smiled. His own information did not go very far, but he did his best to reach infantile understanding; told him that the clay was a kind of earth dug from the river-side, and that coal grew underground, and was brought up in baskets out of a deep hole by a horse that was always walking round and round to wind them up to the top by a rope that wound round a thick wooden post.[1]

This was a puzzler for William. He wanted to be taken there and then to see the horse go round and round.

Ales, coming at that moment to pay the man, hoping to put a check on the child's new notion, exclaimed—

'Name o' goodness, do you want the black man to carry you away down the dark pit-hole, where you would never see us any more whatever?'

'Me don't fink they 'ood. They don't take man down,' replied the child sturdily; and at length the

[1] This was the old method of drawing coal and pitmen to the surface, until superseded by machinery. Wells and mills were similarly worked. And still horses are so employed to draw up yachts on the sea-shore, the rope passing round a block.

'man,' ready to go about his business, promised to take him to see the horse go round 'some day.'

''Oo said 'oo 'ood take me to see church, an' 'oo didn't,' then said William in high dudgeon, and lapsed into sullen silence. In all his long illness he had not forgotten the church he had seen but once.

'Never mind, Willem *fach;* if you are a good boy, perhaps mother will let you ride with her to church on Breint next Sunday,' said Rhys in a consolatory tone.

'Sure?' asked William, his face brightening.

'Not *sure,* but I will ask her.' And with that the little fellow seemed satisfied.

The three youngsters were in bed when Rhys made his suggestion over the frugal supper-table. It brought on a sharp controversy, in which Ales joined very freely.

Mrs. Edwards was undecided. She 'feared the child would not be strong enough to sit through the service after the long ride.'

''Deed, there's no fear o' that,' put in Ales; 'but it's Jonet's turn to go to church, before a babe that can't make head or tail of a word that's said; and more like take Davy than either. There's no good of humouring children.'

'Well, I don't know what queer fancy he has got into that curious head of his,' argued Rhys; 'but I think it would be best to humour him this time, lest he should be setting off again, and'—

'Humour him, indeed! More like be giving him a good whipping,' interrupted Ales. 'There's no end to

his queer fancies. It's master over us all he will be soon, I'm thinking.'

Evan had been silent. He agreed with Rhys. 'It is never too soon to learn the way to church,' said he. 'I will carry him there on my shoulders.'

There was a sigh of relief from Mrs. Edwards. 'Ah, then,' she exclaimed, 'Jonet and Davy can take turns on Breint. If it be fine,' she added. She was disinclined to be severe with William at any time, and after his long illness she felt unwilling to thwart him. Yet she had misgivings about indulging the obstinate self-will, 'so like his poor father's,' she told herself, with another sigh. Evan's proposal was hailed as a compromise that would, at least, content Rhys.

Not altogether. He was not content that Evan should usurp his prerogative. *He* was the one to carry his brother if he must be carried. He considered his own proposal the fittest; but, perhaps, ashamed of his foolish jealousy, and remembering the boy's weight, kept his opinion to himself.

November though it was, Sunday happened to be fine. Whatever mist there might be on the mountain-tops, there was no thick smoke to blacken it, and down in the valley it was clearing off.

William and Jonet were in high glee. The little girl had not yet been to church, and he had led her to expect something marvellous. After illness children pick up their strength more rapidly than adults. The week had done wonders for the boy, who had been trotting indoors and out for two or three days.

He saw Jonet seated on a pillow in front of his mother on Breint, but was very much too much of a man to accept the proffered shoulders of Evan.

'Me walk well as Davy and Rhys,' maintained he proudly, and trudged on sturdily so long as the road descended and had been clean washed by rain. But little legs cannot keep the pace with long ones, any more than can short purses with long ones, and after a time the weary little limbs were glad of a mount on the big broad shoulders. Yet even then he made the excuse of 'uncomfrable shoes an' 'tockings.'

He did not talk much as they went, but cast his eyes from side to side, evidently taking note of wayside landmarks. Other people in their Sunday best were also on the road, and exchanged greetings in passing. He was apparently on the watch for Robert Jones, whose cottage of rough stone he recognised at a glance. He expected the 'man' and his donkey to be there also, and expressed his disappointment. But it was not until they passed under the shade of the dark firs that lined the roadside boundary of the vicar's glebe lands, when the lych-gate and the church, with its long body and massive square tower, were full in view, that he became demonstrative.

Breint had been left at a small inn at the foot of the hill, and then William was pleased to dismount from his perch, and, with quite an air of patronising superiority, to take his sister by the hand as if to lead her up the hill, and over the stone stile to astonish her sight with all that had astonished him.

The bells were swinging and ringing over their heads, as they had been ringing for nearly half an hour, but they were early, and whilst Mrs. Edwards and Rhys walked together to their new grave, William stood still with his eyes fixed on the great church tower with childish awe and admiration.

Presently he startled Evan with the strange questions: 'How did it get there? Did it grow?'

His pointed finger showed to what it referred.

'Grow, child? No. It was built.'

'What is built?'

'Men brought stones, look you, and put them together.'

'How?'

''Deed, William, you do be asking queer questions. I will, maybe, show you how it was built next week.'

'Will you? Could me build big church if me was big man?'

''Deed, and perhaps you might help.'

'Then me *will*.'

At that moment, to Evan's relief, Mrs. Edwards caught her little boy by the hand to lead him inside, Davy having taken charge of Jonet.

Church, clergyman, congregation, service — all were strange to the girl. Her head turned this way and that; now with a smile as she recognised some familiar face; but ere long she wearied, and, not being allowed to talk, she fell asleep, and slept, with her head against her mother's cloak, throughout the sermon.

Not so William. The service was no more intelligible or interesting to him, but his unsatisfied, wide-awake eyes were everywhere exploring the sacred interior; his little mind lost in large wonder at the length of the building and the lofty roof overhead, so much larger to a child's imagination than its actuality. And how far his crude speculations went must remain a mystery to the end of time.

The service over, Mrs. Edwards, holding Jonet by the hand, joined the stream of worshippers on their way to the porch, nothing doubting that she was followed by her boys. Once in the wide churchyard, dotted with upright slabs of stone, over which two magnificent yew-trees had stood sentinel for centuries, the congregation broke up into groups and family parties, to greet each other, and discuss alike the affairs of individuals, of the nation, and of the widespread parish—so widespread, indeed, that families whose ancestors lay all around lived too far apart for the meeting of kith and kin, except on the seventh day and on the common God's acre. Young people too —cousins and friends—clasped hands and blushed, or looked shyly at each other when only that was possible. The old vicar, too, when disrobed, would saunter from one group to another, shaking hands and inquiring about asthma, rheumatism, crops, and sweethearts, with genial impartiality. Here he would admonish one, there advise another; now his voice was low in condolence, anon cheery in congratulation; and, unless when there was some dispute over tithes, none ever turned towards him the cold shoulder.

He greeted the widow thus: 'Ah, Mrs. Edwards, I observe you have brought your whole family with you to-day. That is as it should be. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."'

'Yes, sir,' she answered respectfully, 'I brought them all — Willem'— she looked round; 'Rhys, where is Willem?'

'Ah, indeed, yes, where is the little fellow? I heard he had been very ill.'

Another assent, another look round, the boy was nowhere within sight. But Evan was seen stalking towards the porch, and in a couple of minutes out he came leading the boy by the hand.

He had found him standing in front of the communion-table, looking with awestruck eyes down the whole length of the church, but he suffered Evan to lead him away without demur.

By that time, however, the vicar had gone, and Rhys, who had been round the church to look for the absentee, came back cross and ill-tempered. He had promised Cate to walk home along with her and her father, and had not been too well pleased to see them pass out over the stile beside the lych-gate, whilst he was still seeking what he could not find.

'Where had you got to, you young plague?' he cried, with a frown on his face, taking the boy by the shoulders and shaking him angrily. 'You are always running off somewhere. But I'll thrash you if you do it again.'

The mother interposed, but the harmony of the hour and the peace of the sacred place were alike disturbed, and Rhys marched off sullenly in advance, hardly caring whether he overtook the weaver and his daughter in his ill-humour.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS.

EVAN was one of those capable individuals, who, through making good use of eyes and ears, can turn their hands readily to anything. In those days, before the 'division of labour' had been formulated into a creed, the class was more common, and still in remote country places individuals of the type may be found. In addition to his field-work he had helped the shepherd to mend the stone fence of his sheepfold, and had made the ragged roof of the cattle-shed wind and weather proof with the heather Rhys had cut down. He had yet to demonstrate his 'all-round' faculty in the performance of a promise made, in the first place, to Mrs. Edwards, and secondly, to little William.

It was quite a common thing in Wales, as it is in Ireland to this day, for the pigs to wander over the farm, or out in the roads, poking their snouts into the proprietor's kitchen as a matter of course, and making free with root-crops meant for human beings. But as it happened that Mrs. Edwards and Evan had experience of a better state of things, they were agreed as to its adoption.

Consequently, at the beginning of the week, William, who had begun to follow Evan about like a small shadow, was delighted to watch him and Lewis clear away a large space among the outbuildings, and Robert Jones came two or three times with loads of rough stones from a local quarry, which his two patient beasts drew on the singular sleds or sledges that did duty for wheeled carts in those mountain regions.

But it was the process of piling and fitting these loose and shapeless stones on one another, so as to bind together in a firm and compact wall without cement, that kept William dancing with excitement unfelt by either passive Davy or Jonet, to whom a stitch more or less in their knitting appeared of vastly more importance than the raising of a common wall. It might suit William to caper about, or to stagger under a voluntary load of stone, and fancy he was helping, it did not much interest them.

Yet these children were no blinder than the world at large to 'the day of small things.'

But when they noticed the rising walls shaping into two adjoining square enclosures with little doorways, across which he placed long, flat pieces of wood to support the upper courses of stone, and beheld a conical roof rise over each in genuine Welsh form, and learned that the two small houses were for the pigs to live in, Davy himself set up an exclamation of surprise, as Rhys had done before him. And, no doubt, Evan would have been equally surprised had he been told that the bee-hive form was as ancient as the habitations of those

early British ancestors who fled to the Cambrian mountains for refuge from the Roman and Saxon invaders.

Astonishment was exhausted when Williams, the Eglwysilan carpenter, on the Wednesday, brought a couple of stout wooden troughs and gates, for by that time each conical sty had been supplied with a small walled forecourt of its own, and Evan had covered the earthen floors with a thick carpet of dry fern for the pigs to lie upon. And whilst the man was at work fixing up the gates, he made a broom of ling, and began scrubbing the dirty old sow vigorously, to make her fit for her clean abode. The pigs grunted and the children laughed. So did Williams, the carpenter, to whom pig-scrubbing was a novelty. And so did Rhys, who came up the yard at the time, his lip curling with fine scorn.

But Ales, who had lived with her mistress long enough to imbibe her advanced notions of cleanliness, and had, besides, a natural vein of good sense in her composition, called out from the unshuttered dairy window, where she stood drawing a knife through and through the newly-churned butter to remove accidental cow-hairs before making up: 'Them as likes good bacon should be caring for the swine. There's fools as would rather be sticking in the mud than mending the roads.'

Having delivered this oracular rebuke to the scorners, she resumed her butter-making with renewed energy, none the less for the swift glance and smile of approval she had seen on Evan's quickly upturned face.

She and Evan were becoming as good friends as he and William, and he did not affect to despise an additional friend on the hearth where Rhys was silently hostile. Beyond the bounds of the farm he felt he could defend himself, if necessary.

But it would be as easy to defend oneself from a fog as from the whisperings of envy or the shrugs and jeers of ignorance.

Already was the voice of prophecy upraised among the Sunday gossips that Evan Evans would bring ruin on Brookside Farm with his foolish new ways.

The very carpenter who had taken the order for the woodwork of the new sties had tuned saw and plane to laughter, and hammered down his conviction that 'Mrs. Edwards would be finding out the folly too late.' And listening lag-behinds shook their shock-heads and fell back on the old Welsh proverb: 'Ah, a widow's goods will soon be gone.'

When these whisperings reached the widow in the guise of advice from well-meaning cousins in all degrees of affinity, she put them down with a short, decisive answer: 'Look you, I do have my ways, you do be having yours. Keep your own spade for your own farm.'

She wondered how the petty details of new management had reached so many ears, and gave Lewis a sharp hint not to gossip about what did not concern him. But she never suspected Rhys of dropping the word-seeds that rose up around them as ill weeds of speech and thought.

She had seen Rhys kick over wantonly a miniature wall that William was attempting to 'build' across the threshold with Evan's refuse stone chippings, and she had rebuked him sharply when he flung out angrily the small collection the child had brought indoors to 'build' with—just such a heap as a modern boy's box of bricks—not taking his pretence of 'a litter' as an excuse. She had gone so far as to insist on the restoration of the 'poor darling's playthings'; but just as she failed to hear him delegate to Davy the task of picking up the scattered treasures William was crying for, so she failed to suspect her eldest born of any ungenerous feeling towards Evan, or any unworthy comment on private affairs to strangers.

So long as roads were passable, and skies at all propitious, Mrs. Edwards was certain to ride to Caerphilly market, companioned by Rhys, less for protection than for his instruction. When Aquarius was reckless with his water-pot, Evan alone bestrode Breint, and seldom failed to make a good market.

Equally, when Sundays were fine, Mrs. Edwards went to church, and with her Rhys and one of the younger ones; Evan's shoulders being always at the service of William rather than disappoint the boy. Yet, when the broken weather kept the house-mother and children from Sunday service, Ales was prompt and ready to accompany Rhys and Evan, even when the morning mist became a drizzle or a blinding fog. Umbrellas were unknown, and, therefore, unmissed. Cased in her thick, dark-blue cloak, its large hood drawn over her

low-crowned, black-felt man's hat, and the white linen cap under that, she seemed to heed the weather as little as her companions in their heavy coats, and generally came back, after her long barefooted walk, as rosy and bright as if the sun had been shining overhead, and the pathway of velvet sward.

If Rhys started with them, he had a trick of deserting them, and joining Owen Griffith and Cate. But he was so far his own master, and, as they made no complaint, Mrs. Edwards had no suspicion of his defection, or of an intimacy so close as to have become confidential.

And, although Owen had been one of the first to follow Mrs. Edwards' lead in the matter of whitewashing and window-glazing, and had been a very good friend and adviser to the widow in her hour of sorest need, and would have been the first to rise in her defence, neither his wife, nor Cate, nor it may be himself, was above the bird-like propensity to pick up stray crumbs of confidence, or to drop them for other well-meaning, bird-like chatterers to pick up. So it came about that little was done on the farm that was not discussed half over the parish.

Yet, notwithstanding proverb or prophecy, the widow's goods were in no danger from unthrift.

Whether rain or fair, whosoever went to church or stayed at home,—and as the winter advanced the roads became impassable,—no sooner was the kitchen cleared after the simple dinner, than the big Welsh Bible was laid reverently upon the table, and either Mrs. Edwards

or Rhys read a chapter or two aloud, she venturing to expound the text to immature understandings.

Theologians might have smiled, or shaken their wise heads over her expositions, but she was a clear-headed woman, and seldom dived below her depth.

She never allowed anything to break into this Sunday custom. It was a family bond drawing them all closer together; even the youngest bringing their low wooden stools nearer, and listening with attention not common where books and other objects of interest are many.

In the wet and snowy winter months, when outdoor labour was restricted and the days short, indoor work was at its busiest. Doors would be closed to keep out the cold winds, Evan would bring fresh squares of peat and fire-balls to keep the hearth aglow. He would take the place of Ales at the churn, or would hang up the big porridge-pot, or (if cheese-making was about, though there was little cheese made in the winter) the great whey-pot, with hearty goodwill to help her. Then a candle would be alight, and whilst the cat and dog lay basking in front of the fire, all, down to the youngest, would have some useful or profitable occupation.

It was then Mrs. Edwards' spinning-wheel went round the swiftest, and sang its song of industry the loudest.

In former days her husband had combed the wool, and was teaching Rhys how to fling the tufts of greasy and matted wool over the heated iron combs set in an upright staff, and to draw them out like the long locks of a woman's hair. She had always sorted her own fleeces. We are all familiar with the sign of 'The

Golden Fleece.' Well, just so the fleece of a sheep hangs together after it is sheared away, but in every fleece are several different qualities of wool, and the sorting and separating those qualities calls for a discriminating touch. This continued to be her task, though Evan took the wool-combing in hand, Rhys having an occasional turn with the coarser sorts.

Ales, in generous rivalry with her mistress, having no second spinning-wheel, took up her distaff, as did half the women in the Principality, and set her spindle dancing on the floor as she drew out her thread of wool or linen.

Knitting was taken up by any one of them when not otherwise employed.

Thus Rhys plied his knitting-pins with ease and certainty, and the long blue or black woollen stockings grew under his fingers, whilst he proudly exercised his dead father's function, and taught his sister and brothers to read.

It was a tedious occupation; and he might not have taken it up from choice, or accepted the office willingly, but the monotonous drawl of the learners sounded an undertone to the musical hum of his mother's wheel, and set his heart aglow with the feeling that, however and wherever Evan had superseded him, in *that* at least *he* represented his dead father, and was, in his own opinion, the head of the house, having authority over the younger ones.

It made him more patient with them than he otherwise might have been. And it kept under his reluctance

to teach little William his letters, when the child, with a laudable desire to look big and do what Davy and Jonet did, insisted on an introduction to the painted characters on his sister's battledore.[1]

'Me tree years old,' Willie had pleaded, when Rhys asserted that he was too young to learn, and when that did not serve, 'Me ask Evan, Evan teach me,' was quite sufficient. Rhys drew his dark brows together, but he put down his knitting and pointed to the letters without another word of objection.

Having thus, as it were, compelled his brother to teach him as a favour, he stuck to his self-imposed task with unflagging determination, as if he had something to master that must be mastered. And, perhaps, not the less persistently because, with all a sharp child's acute perception, he saw he was having his own way in spite of Rhys. Having his own way also in being free to build walls and houses on the great chest under the window with his accumulating bits of stone.

That is, until Ales came at an early hour and swept his building materials into a corner, and swept him and Jonet off to bed with equal promptitude, barely waiting whilst they said their simple prayers.

Work (the knitting, spinning, and wool-combing) did not cease until the general supper-time, about eight o'clock: but conversation lightened it, the distance

[1] An oblong board about ten inches long by eight wide, on which the alphabets and simple syllables were painted. It was furnished with a handle. In many cases the letters were printed and covered with a transparent slice of horn. It was then called a hornbook.

between mistress and servants being scarcely felt or perceptible, though one directed and the others obeyed.

Sometimes Evan might have occasion to look after a sick beast, or Ales to prepare a warm mash, or the shepherd might come in to report the condition of his flock; but so, with little variation, went on the routine of the farm, until renewing spring brought fresh activities and outdoor occupations.

Spring, too, brought wizened Mr. Pryse, the agent, intrusively prying round the farm, his half-shut eyes scanning homestead and tillage with eager craving to discover signs of the mismanagement over which rumour had been busy.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BAFFLED AGENT.

MR. PRYSE mounted his horse and trotted away from the farm, biting his long nails as he went in sheer vexation. His survey had not been as satisfactory to himself as he had anticipated. The land was in good cultivation, and every one was at work upon it. In one brown field lime lay in round, white heaps; compost, from the farmyard, showed in dark patches, ready for distribution on the grass land. In one field Evan was sowing oats; in another plot, where the spade had turned over the ground in well-defined furrows, Rhys was dibbling holes for planting, and Davy followed, dropping in something he carried in a small basket, which would have baffled the sharp optics of the observer, had he not come across Ales, besides a heap of seed potatoes, cutting them up into pieces where the eyes were beginning to shoot, and seen Davy bring his empty basket for a fresh supply.

'Mrs. Edwards do be in the house, sir,' said the young woman, as a hint that his inquisitorial observation was unpleasant; and, after a sneer at what he called 'experimental farming,' the hint had been taken.

He had already been on to the moorlands to inspect

sheep and goats, and put the shepherd through the fine sieve, and had come back over newly-sown crops, or springing shoots of green ones, heedless where the hoofs of his horse might fall. Had he been lord of the land in full possession, he could scarcely have been more indifferent; had he been tenant, he might have been more careful. As he neared the homestead, and saw barn and outbuildings in good repair, where he had expected dilapidation, he pressed his thin lips close together, but when he came upon the newly-erected sties, the thin lips spread, and made an abortive attempt to curl.

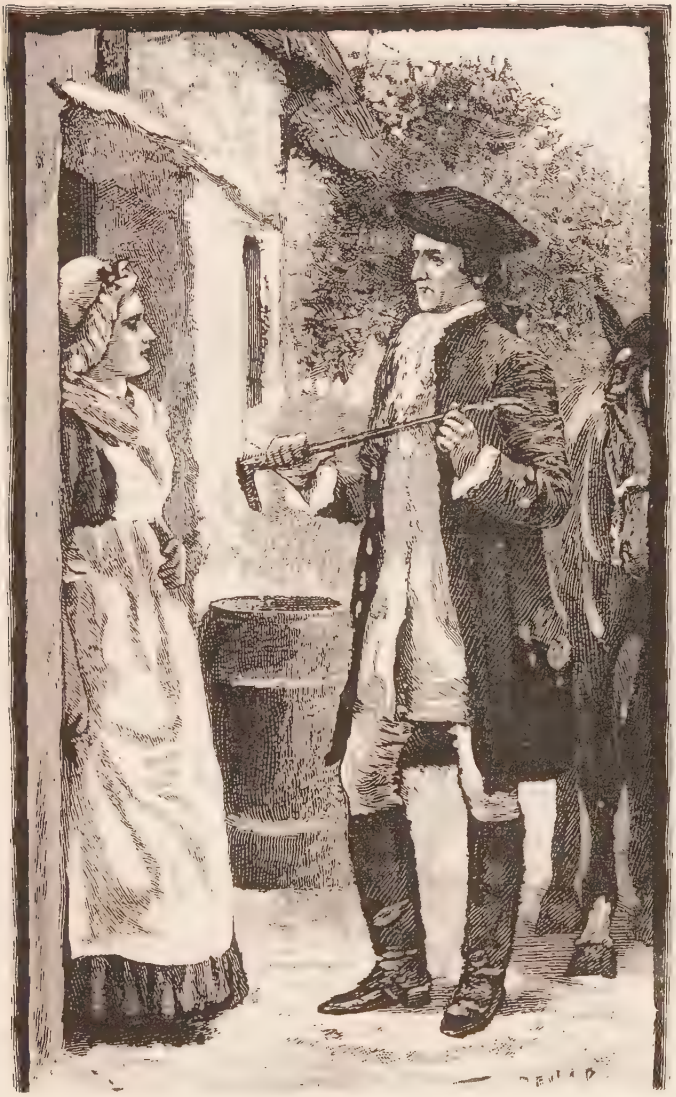
'So that is how you propose to carry on your farm, is it? Aping the gentry!' he said, with a sneer, addressing Mrs. Edwards as he dismounted, the sound of hoof-beats having brought her to the dairy door. 'Do you imagine it will pay *you* to house your hogs? You will be for putting your goats into limbo next.'

''Deed, and I wish I could,' was her response. 'They do so much damage to the trees and thatch.'

'Ugh! And pray where did *you* see hogs so accommodated? Not in the Vale of Glamorgan, I know. We don't house pigs as snugly as our labourers.'

'Sure, sir, it was in England, when I was in service there. And at Castella and Llantwit. But, perhaps, sir, you will be coming in and have a glass of cider and a bite of bread and cheese?'

He looked snappish enough to take a bite at her—or her farm—as he answered: 'England, indeed! Surely



'SO THAT IS HOW YOU PROPOSE TO CARRY ON YOUR FARM?' HE SAID, WITH A SNEER.—*See page* 106.

Welsh ways are best for Welsh people. You will not find English ones prosper here.'

Nevertheless, he followed her into the house, noticing as he went that the dairy had been enclosed and partitioned off close to the jamb of the outer door, and was shut in by its own door on the left, so as to preserve it from the dust of traffic across, and from the open storage on the right.

'Is that another of your English ways?' he asked, as he passed on.

'Yes, sir.'

'Humph! And your wheel, and your glass windows, and your potatoes? You will not find many imitators, Mrs. Edwards.'

''Deed, sir, and I don't be looking for imitators, whatever; unless, perhaps, my children and my servants may be for teaching theirs, as I do be teaching them.'

She had spread a clean, homespun linen cloth on the table under the cheese and the jug of cider, even though she disliked the agent and suspected his errand. Private feeling must not interfere with hospitality.

He, for his part, accepted her attentions as a right, making as free with the cheese and bread and cider as if they had been ordered at an inn, with the relishing consciousness they would not have to be paid for.

'Perhaps,' said he, after a good draught of the cider, 'you learned to make *that* in England too?' the old ugly smile on his thin lips.

'Partly, sir. In Herefordshire.'

Narrowed as were the slits between his eyelids, nothing escaped his roving eyes.

'What's that?' he ejaculated, pointing with his riding whip, as he rose to depart, to a rudely-constructed tower William was raising on the oak chest with his stone chips. The boy had backed into a corner in front of his sister Jonet, as if he recognised a foe in the stranger. Shyness he had none.

His mother explained. 'Willem's building a Tower of Babil.'

'Humph! If he can do that, he might be set to something useful. There,' said Mr. Pryse, 'that will find him employment,' and, with a stroke of his whip, he swept down the boy's tower, a malicious chuckle shaking his skinny throat as he strode out of the kitchen to mount his horse.

As he rode away he heard a boy's passionate scream behind him, and felt the sharp pelting of a couple of small stones between his shoulders. He turned round in his saddle, and shook his whip-hand at the child, who, with face aflame, cried after him—

'You bad man! bad man, you!'

But he only chuckled, as if the incident amused him.

His satisfaction was but temporary, and before he had well reached the level he began biting his nails with vexation, for he saw only signs of improved husbandry, nothing on which he could pounce as betokening ruin.

After a few days came a more welcome visitor to the farm, in the guise of a travelling packman, with his string of mules, on his rounds to collect the stockings,

HE TURNED AND SHOOK HIS WHIP-HAND AT THE CHILD.—*See page* 110.

flannels, blankets, and linseys, knitted and woven in the farms and cottages scattered among the mountains or grouped in villages. For these he was willing to pay in coin, but he preferred to exchange for the English goods with which his beasts were laden, not so much of ribbon and laces, gaily-coloured gown-pieces, or cheap trinkets, as of useful hardware, knives, forks, spoons, crockery, pots and pans, needles, pins, tapes, and buttons; such goods as were in general demand for household use. Very rarely did he display any more georgeous drapery than a silken neckerchief, or a bright ribbon for a bow. The Welsh still clung to their national costume, and, with few exceptions, were clothed entirely in woollen of native growth and manufacture. Still he carried hats with him, and the flannels or duffle collected in one part he could dispose of elsewhere.

The jingling bells on his leading mule proclaimed his arrival. There was a general rush to surround him and inspect his wares, the children crowding in with the rest, and the clack of tongues was indescribable.

His periodical visits were the great events of the year. The first duty was that of hospitality. Oaten bread and cheese and milk were set before him, and the winter's pile of knitted stockings and mittens brought out whilst he refreshed. These, as the man knew of old, had to be examined, priced, and paid for before Mrs. Edwards would allow one of his packs or panniers to be unloaded. Then ensued the bargaining for bright-coloured mugs and bowls; there was no need of teacups and saucers, for no one drank tea. It was almost an unknown luxury there.

Jonet and William were favoured with a mug apiece, adorned with waves of bright blue on a yellow ground. Rhys had a new hat. Davy plucked at his mother's skirts and reminded her that he was to be finally breeched when the packman came round, and he was not disappointed.

Something was wanted and bought for house and everybody.

Ales, who had smartened herself up of late, invested in a bright-coloured cotton kerchief or shawl to be worn crossed over her short jacket, and a stout comb to keep her tangled locks in order; the need for which she learned by surveying her own good looks in a red-framed looking-glass Evan had given to her—a glass not larger than his own right hand, but it was better as a mirror than the broken water under the spring, and might be taken as an earnest of his especial goodwill.

The ensuing rent was paid duly; and, in spite of prophecies and forecasts, it was as duly paid in succeeding years.

But Mr. Pryse grew no more civil; indeed, he seemed ever on the watch for some pretext to turn the widow and her children off the farm she had done so much to improve. He had never forgiven Edwards for saying of him, 'he was too grasping to be altogether honest,' and, when the farmer was drowned, rejoiced as only an evil-minded curmudgeon could do.

It was no satisfaction to him, as years went by, to see one whitewashed cottage after another stand out like a pearl among emerald fields and foliage, and know whose

house had been the model. Nor could he hear of Owen Griffith and others venturing on a potato crop without a sneer. And he positively snarled when he heard the prices the widow's piglings and bacon brought in the market. Not that he ascribed the prosperity of Mrs. Edwards to her own good management. No; he set that down to Evan Evans and his previous initiation on the Castella estate. He owed the farm-servant a grudge accordingly. He rejoiced when he heard that Rhys regarded Evans as an interloper, and never missed an opportunity, by subtle sneer or insinuation, to fan the supposed antagonism into an active flame.

As years rolled on, and he saw the down of incipient manhood darken on the lip of Rhys, ever his mother's escort on rent-days, his innuendoes became broader and stronger. There was an air of self-sustained mastership about the sturdy young fellow that suggested ripe soil for his weeds.

'Humph!' said he, when Rhys was about eighteen; 'I should have thought a stout chap like you might have saved your mother the cost of a *head man*.'

At a later date: 'Well, young man, I never expected your father's son to submit to a servant's rule so long.'

Had there been any *submission* in the case, Rhys would have taken fire at once. No hints would have been needed to provoke rebellion that would have led to the ousting of Evan. But the latter had never presumed to *give orders*, and, of late, had deferred to Rhys as his 'young master.'

Whatever suggestions he made in farming matters were made to Mrs. Edwards. Command rested with *her*.

Then Rhys had conceived a mortal antipathy to the agent that first rent-paying day, and he suspected a sinister motive in every word that fell from the ill-natured, thin lips.

And it had been made a condition, by the shrewd widow, that Rhys should bridle his tongue, and allow nothing said by Mr. Pryse to provoke hasty reply, or she must take Evan in his stead as witness. Yet it was hard sometimes for either to listen quietly to the agent's coarse and insulting speeches, of which his noble employer had no suspicion.

Some of his sharpest bullets were fired from a double-barrelled gun. 'Well, Mrs. Edwards, I hear you and Evan Evans are about to make a match of it at last. How soon is this fine young man of yours to have a step-father?'

A frown darkened the brow of Rhys, and an indignant retort was on his tongue, but, before a second word was uttered, the frown changed to a significant smile at a look from his mother.

It was an open secret at the farm that Ales and Evan were courting, and only waited until they had saved enough money to set up housekeeping and farming for themselves, as husband and wife.

Had Mr. Pryse but known it, there *was* an element of disquiet and rebellion at Brookside Farm, of which he might have taken advantage.

But he never gave a second thought to the boy whose walls he had levelled so wantonly. He had not seen that same boy, his passion over, pick up every scattered bit of stone, and patiently raise his walls once more.

He had no suspicion how the strong will and pertinacity of that three years child would come later into collision with the mastership of his eldest brother, or the important part these stone chips would play in William's life, or how they might affect the welfare of the whole county, or make an enduring name when his own was forgotten.

CHAPTER X.

FRIENDS AND BROTHERS.

THERE was no necessity for Mr. Pryse to suggest 'employment' for little William. In the last century, and far into this, children were set to work and expected to earn their own living at a wofully early age, and that long before machinery came into use and drove them into factories to be the slaves of brutal overseers, who scored their six and eight year old backs with weals from whip or stick on the slightest provocation. William Hutton, the historian, tells how he, a small child of seven years, was apprenticed, in 1730, to an overseer of Lombe's silk mill, in Derby, how he had to wear high pattens to reach the machine, had to rise at five in the depth of winter and hurry to work, slipping down on the ice as he ran, and how he was beaten till his back was all festering sores. And this was no uncommon case. I, who write this, can remember when the little barefooted children went to the cotton factories and print works at five in the morning, and worked till seven or eight at night.

The boys and girls of this generation have no conception how children were trained and treated a few

generations back. Not the poor only. The children of even rich parents had to endure painful punishments both at school and at home, and were fed sparely on coarse food for their health's sake. The late noble Lord Shaftesbury related how he and a sister were well-nigh starved in their childhood through the negligence of parents and servants.

History and biography teem with such instances. So that when I state that William Edwards and Jonet were sent into their mother's fields to weed, and pick up stones, and scare the birds away from newly-sown lands before the boy was six years old, I cast no reflection on his mother, who had no experience of a different state of things.

Nay, for her time, she was enlightened, and being a woman with good natural feeling, she was careful they were not taxed beyond their strength, as she and her husband had been; but that children should spend their hours in play, when they were old enough to be of use, had never dawned on her imagination. She considered she was doing her duty by them in setting them early to work, especially as she was careful they should be taught to read also.

Davy worked in field and farm, alongside Rhys, without a murmur of hardship. And when Jonet was first set to feed the chickens, or to look for the eggs of hens that laid away, to pull peas or beans, or to shell the latter for the pot (peas were boiled in the pod), imitative William, always at her heels, and wanting to show his own cleverness, set himself to do likewise.

And so long as he set himself voluntarily to work to assist Jonet, he was busy as a bee, and proud of his doings. Or when his mother or Ales sent him hither or thither to fetch or carry, or directed him to perform small services, he was as willing and amenable to order as most boys of his age. But no sooner did Rhys take advantage of his precocious industry, and exercise an assumed right to command, and bid him do this or that, than William began to rebel.

He was docile enough to his brother as a teacher. He was more eager to learn to read than Rhys was to instruct. Davy and Jonet took their spelling and reading lessons as compulsory tasks—Davy placidly, and Jonet with uneasy disfavour — but William with an absolute desire to *know*.

He no sooner discovered that the Ten Commandments painted up in the church, and the inscriptions on the upright gravestones in the churchyard, were just made up of the alphabetical characters on his painted battledore, and that the big Bible his mother read aloud to them was all a mixture of the same letters, than a craving to penetrate the mystery of these combinations seized him. He felt he had achieved something when he made his first grand discovery on a headstone taller than himself; but when, at his request, Evan read out the inscription, his perplexity and curiosity increased.

It was singular to see the little fellow—he was short for his age—Sunday by Sunday tracing letter or word, with tiny finger, on some grey old slab, while his seniors were gossiping all around.

'I tell you what,' said Rhys to him one Sunday when so employed, 'you might have been born in a stone quarry. I'm sure you ought to live in one, you do be so fond of the dirty rubbish.'

'What's a stone quarry?' put in William, with wide-open eyes.

'Oh, bother! It's a place where stone grows,' was the impatient reply.

'Grows like trees?' and the wondering eyes of the six years old querist opened still wider.

'Oh, what a plague you do be! No, grows like coal;' and away strode Rhys to avoid further questioning—a common but very unsatisfactory way of dealing with an inquiring child.

'I'll be asking Robert Jones, he will tell me,' said William to himself. 'Rhys do be caring more for Cate Griffith than for me, whatever,' his aggrieved looks following his well-grown brother as he strode over the grassy mound to join the weaver's wife and daughter under the patriarchal yew-tree, with all the importance of incipient manhood.

The following day William was missing from the farm, but as this was not uncommon, only slight uneasiness was felt until evening.

The boy had long before struck up a strange friendship with the red-haired peat-cutter, who, in fulfilment of his early promise, had taken him on his ass when bound to a colliery across the river for culm, and there let him see the horse plodding round and round in a circle to wind up coal and grimy colliers from the dark,

deep pit-shaft, and let down the empty tubs to be refilled. There the child had looked round in wonder at the great black heaps of coal, and at the half-naked children sent down the terrible dark hole, to work in the bowels of the mine, as Robert Jones explained to him.

Later he had taken the little fellow to see how peat was cut with long, narrow, flat shovels, 'shaped like a marrow-spoon,' from the boggy top of Eglwysilan Mountain. And when his sled was loaded, he had placed the child before him on the end of the sled, and gone sliding down the steep mountain-side with him swiftly and securely, to the youngster's infinite delight. He was too young to dream of danger, and to the man, long practice had made the perilous descent safe and easy, swift as was the downward motion, and sharp as was the jerk at the bottom. And many a ride on the turf-cutter's sled did William have after that.

The man had no children of his own, and, perhaps, that was the reason he took so kindly to the lad; answering his strange questions to the best of his untutored ability, and frequently giving him a mount on one of his patient beasts between tubs or panniers when going for loads, or carrying them for sale not too far away. To him the child could open all his wondering heart, fearing neither repulse nor ridicule, of which he had too much at home; and so their friendship grew.

On that particular Monday morning, Robert Jones had started on a long round, and nothing remained for the young inquirer, who had sought him at his ordinary

haunts, but to limp homeward in the afternoon, hungry, footsore, and disappointed.

Cate Griffith, returning from the brook with a pitcher of water on her head and another in her hand, caught sight of him as he was passing her father's door.

'Name o' goodness!' she cried, 'what brings you here this time o' day? Look you, father, here's little Willem Edwards!'

The weaver, then changing his shuttle, looked out from his casement window, and in two minutes was at the door questioning the wanderer.

Without any shyness or reservation the boy told where he had been, and for what; his brother's initiative remarks with the rest.

Cate, now a rosy-cheeked, buxom lass on the borderland of womanhood, began to laugh outright, as she had often laughed before when Rhys amused her with some story of William's out-of-the-way questions.

Her father checked her sternly. 'What do you be laughing at?'

''Deed, he do be so queer. Rhys do say he be always at play with bits of stones. And now he asks if they do grow like trees. Oh, Willem, you are droll!'

Again her laugh broke out. William, child though he was, crimsoned to the roots of his brown hair. He seemed to comprehend that Rhys had made a jest of him, and no one is more sensitive to ridicule than a child of tender years.

'Carry your pitchers into the house, and stay there!'

cried her father. Then turning to the boy, who hesitated whether to linger or walk on, he said kindly—

'Never mind Cate, my little man, she talks foolishness. Come and sit on this bench beside me. I'll try to serve instead of Robert Jones.'

William's face lit up. He climbed to a seat by the weaver's side, content to find he was no longer laughed at. And very intently he listened to Owen's simple explanation that the mountain was nearly all stone, and that a quarry was the place where strong men broke away the stone for building walls and houses, and that the mountains had been there ever since God created the world, so that he did not think stone grew. And if Owen's was not a learned geological definition, it was all the better adapted to juvenile comprehension. But, simple as it was, a shower of whys and hows were rained on the exponent during its course.

Then William rose to depart, but something in his face, or in his lagging gait, or a casual word, caused the weaver to interrogate the boy. This elicited the admission that he had strayed away from home in the morning, and that no one knew, and, moreover, that he was very hungry.

Owen looked grave. He called for Cate to bring some bread and a cup of milk, and began to read the boy a lesson on the inconsiderate wrong he had done, and the anxiety he would cause his mother.

'You should never leave home without permission, Willem. Your poor mother will be fretting and crying for fear lest you have fallen over the rocks, or got into

the river and been drowned, or lost your way on the mountain as you did four years ago, when Evan found you asleep under the Druids' rocking-stone. It is very cruel and wicked for a child to stray from home without leave.'

William hung his head. 'I did not mean any harm,' he began; 'but,' in a changed tone, 'what's the Druids?'—

'Oh, you're here, are you? A fine hunt you have given us all, you young plague,' came in an angry shout from Rhys, who had crossed the brook and was advancing at a run.

William's question died away unanswered. He got down from his stone seat inclined to be penitent for his misbehaviour. Owen Griffith had shown him that he had done wrong. He might have gone home and told his mother he was sorry. But Rhys, who had been as much alarmed at his absence as the rest, now he was found, caught him by the shoulder and shook him roughly.

'Look you, if you do be running off again, I shall give you a good thrashing.'

''Deed you won't,' was thrown back at him defiantly by William, whose penitence was at an end.

'Won't I? You'll see. Sure, I've half a mind to do it now.'

'Nay, nay,' interposed Griffith. 'Willem is sorry. He did not know he was doing wrong.'

'Then he will have to learn. It's quite time he made himself useful. Jonet did before she was his age.

And so did I. We can have no idlers on our farm, whatever. Ah, Cate, is that you?' His voice had brought the girl to the open window. She leaned out, blushing like a peony. He joined her, and said something which made her giggle and provoked reply. Then ensued some whispering and laughter. Rhys apparently forgot all about William and his mother's anxiety whilst occupied so pleasantly, for there was no doubt Cate had more than a third-cousinly attraction for him, and chance opportunities for seeing her except on Sundays were not frequent.

When his errand recurred to him, William had disappeared, and notwithstanding Rhys' longer legs, the fatigue of the small ones, the gathering dusk, and the steepness of the ascending path to the farm, the truant crossed the threshold first.

At once uneasiness resolved itself into displeasure. He was scolded on all sides, and threatened with the loss of a supper if ever he ventured to give them such a fright again.

'I wanted Robert Jones,' was all the excuse he made. The scolding was received with stolid silence, which was called sullenness.

Yet he had not forgotten Owen's picture of his mother's distress, or his grave reproof for straying away, and had he been differently received, he might have been contrite and sued for pardon.

It is a difficult matter, even in these analytic days, to search out the inner workings of the child-mind, or to understand all that influences wayward moods. How

were those rudely-cultivated farmers to penetrate beneath the surface, to see the undeveloped oak in the immature acorn?

'Robert Jones do be spoiling that boy,' said Mrs. Edwards, when the child was in bed. 'I wonder what he wanted with the man?'

'Wanted? Sure, he wanted to ask if stones do grow like trees,' said Rhys, in a tone of impatient scorn. 'It was only last week he did be asking me if the trees made the wind, because it was always windy when the trees tossed about.'

'Well, *don't* they?' queried stolid Davy, amidst a roar of laughter, in which even the mother joined.

'Now, don't you be as silly as Willem. I never before knew you ask such a foolish question,' said Rhys dogmatically.

'No, Davy,' explained his mother, without stopping her busy wheel, 'it is the wind that blows the trees about,'—an answer which sufficed for him. He was not curious to learn what caused the winds, or whence they came, as William had been. He accepted facts as they were, untroubled by vain speculations.

Undoubtedly William — the father's namesake, her youngest born—was the mother's darling, in spite of his odd ways. And however cross she might have been overnight, in the morning, when the others had dispersed, she took him to task for straying away without leave; not angrily, but sadly, showing him the trouble he was likely to cause, and the anxiety she had had, remembering the time when he was lost before.

It was a very effectual supplement to Owen Griffith's lecture; the sensitive boy's feelings were touched. He threw his arms around her neck, begged forgiveness, and promised the best of behaviour for the future.

Alas, for a child's promises! William went to work beside Jonet like a little man, helped in seed-time and harvest, and won commendations from Ales and Evan. But he had his dreamy hours; he continued to pile up stones in odd corners, and was alternately ridiculed and rebuked by Rhys, whose interference he resented.

This went on for about two years, trying the patience of both, and then came a more serious outbreak.

CHAPTER XI.

A MEMORABLE ENCOUNTER.

WILLIAM'S rebellion had begun to show itself in sullen disregard of his brother's orders. He was always active and willing when his mother or Evan called him—Davy might convey a message, but never had an independent order to give—he was Jonet's obedient bond-slave, but when Rhys demanded his services or attention he generally turned a deaf ear. For this, Rhys—who considered his ten years' seniority quite a warranty for control as his mother's deputy and his dead father's representative—took him to task imperiously, not with any desire to be knowingly overbearing, but from a stern sense of his own duty to a lazy lad.

At length, one bright day in early spring, when William was little more than nine years of age, he stood lingering after the midday meal close beside the stone gate-posts of a field where Davy and Jonet were already busy weeding a freshly springing crop of corn. His arms rested upon the coping of the wall with his chin upon them, whilst he, looking down into the fertile vale below — where glimpses of the shining river were discernible like twinkling stars, through the tender

green shoots which veiled the swaying boughs on its densely-wooded banks—seemed lost in a dreamy mist of speculative thought. The boy's reverie was rudely broken.

'Now then, lazyback! What do you be doing there?' called out Rhys, who carried a spade on one shoulder and a wicker basket in his hand, which he tossed down at his brother's feet. No answer coming, he called out again, 'What do you be doing there?'

'I do be thinking,' came composedly from William.

'Thinking, indeed! I wish you would be thinking about your work. What can you have to think about, whatever?'

''Deed, nobody knows my thinks,' replied the boy, without turning round.

'You will very soon know *my thinks*,' retorted Rhys, 'if you do not pick up your basket, and get to your weeding. You are one of the "late and lazy who will never be rich." Come, stir you.' And, as if to enforce obedience, Rhys raised his disengaged hand and struck the other a sharp blow across the shoulders.

At once William turned round, his cheeks and eyes aflame. Rhys thought he was about to strike him back again.

Instead, he gave the empty basket a kick that sent it flying over the ridges, and was out at the narrow gateway in an instant, with a defiant air that seemed to dare Rhys to lay hands upon him again, or attempt to draw him back.

That day he was seen no more upon the farm until

nightfall, when he was sent to bed supperless as a punishment.

He was up betimes in the morning, and had the fire alight before any one else was astir. He was having a wash at the spring when Ales came into the farmyard.

'Name o' goodness!' exclaimed she, 'what's got you out of bed so soon? Want your breakfast, I suppose?'

William nodded in assent, on his way to the common towel.

'Do you think you be deserving any?'

'Does Rhys be deserving any?'

Ales had a proverb ready, 'Who does well, deserves well.'

'Is it doing well to call names and be striking his brother?'

Ales had no direct answer to that. 'Rhys says you are idle and should be made to work. You do be playing with stones when you should be weeding or knitting. *He* does always be working hard,' she replied evasively.

Prompt was the retort, 'A big man should work, I will do better work than Rhys when I am as big. 'Deed I will.'

This conversation had taken place during the hasty ablutions of Ales, who had latterly grown uncommonly anxious to present 'a shining morning face' to Evan when he appeared. As she combed out her hair at the diminutive looking-glass he had bought her, as a hint, and which hung beside the storehouse door, she began in an insinuating tone—

'And where did you be going yesterday, Willem? Did you be with Robert Jones?'

'Never be you minding,' said the boy, walking past with a pitcher of water for the porridge. And no further information could she or any one else extract from him.

After that, whenever Rhys and he came into collision he disappeared, and none could say whither he went or with whom. Cate or Owen Griffith might see him pass the cottage door, and exchange a 'good-day' greeting, but beyond that his wanderings were unknown.

In a mountainous parish like Eglwysilan, where was no village community, where farms and cottages were mostly solitary and far apart, there was little chance of encountering many strollers out of the main highway, except on market-days.

Wandering aimlessly in his blind passion, on the day when Rhys had struck him, hardly noting the way he went, he found himself all on a sudden on what appeared to be a short, grass-grown roadway, bordered on both sides by upright blocks of stone, more stunted and less shapely than the slabs in the churchyard, but planted there with so much method in their irregular intervals, they might indeed have been dwarf guards to some great giant turned suddenly to stone by the magic art of a still greater necromancer of the olden time, as he had heard.

Such legends were common on the domestic hearth. So that, although it was a bright spring afternoon, an eerie feeling crept over the passionate boy, especially when he found himself within a wide circle of such

stones, surrounding, in double file, a huge angular mass of like stone, narrowing downwards from a flat top, capped by a second stone, and delicately poised on the rounded point of a small conical base in a hollowed depression of the natural rock, and in some sort bearing out the simile of the petrified giant's throne.

As William looked upon this unshapely mass, some dreamy recollection floated through his mind of having visited the spot before, when the stones had seemed alive, and making mouths at him. Without nearing the central stone, but keeping his eye upon it, he walked slowly round within the inner circle, and, as he went discovered a second path (leading north) corresponding with the one by which he had entered from the south.

Then it dawned upon him this must indeed be the spot where he had lain down faint and tired, when he was, oh, such a little boy, and had been so frightened by the grim aspect of the stones, as the dark night had come on, and he could not rise to get away.

Soon he ventured to touch the large central stone that had terrified him before by giving way on the pressure of his tiny hand. It swayed and rocked to and fro, and he drew back instinctively, but it did not fall. And now he knew it surely for the great rocking-stone, and no longer feared that it would fall and crush him so long as he was good and true, for so the legend ran.

But now other doubts and fears oppressed him. These would be the very Druid-stones Owen Griffith had named, and Robert Jones had warned him not to seek, lest some great harm should come to him.

Was it true there were once men called Druids, and did they come to life at midnight and nod to the moon, and to the big nodding-stones? Robert Jones and Ales both said they did, though they had never ventured there at midnight to see. They only looked like ill-shaped stones, too little for men. But had they not made faces at him when he was a bit of a baby crying there in the dark?

The boy's heart sank. He was not proof against the grim and weird recollection. He took to his heels and ran out of the memory-haunted circle by the stone-guarded avenue next to him, nor stopped until he had left the desolate and barren spot far behind.

But where was he? That was not the way towards home. He stood on a wild heath, high above the valley of the Taff, with the mountain rising and stretching far away on his right hand, with here and there labourers tilling the red-brown upland fields, and children at work beside them, as he should have been working 'but for Rhys,' he told himself.

He did not know, and could not see it, but the Merthyr Tydvil road, such as it was, lay sunk between the heath and the receding mountain. He had only to gain that, and turn completely round, to find his way homeward.

He looked to the wooded declivity on his left, where birds were calling to their mates under the swelling pinky buds or pale-green opening fans, and the odour of wood violets came sweetly fresh in every breath he drew. A rabbit rose and scuttered past him, and made

for the underwood, where the golden crosiers of trooping ferns were uncurling in their beauty. The river ran far below, ran with an inviting rush. One moment, and the boy had plunged into the wood. 'He would *not* hurry home to be struck by Rhys.'

He could easily find his way back with the river to guide him.

So, now slipping, now catching at the trunk of a tree to maintain a foothold, he scrambled nearer to the river's brink, where was no more perceptible path than what had been made by intruders like himself. Once there he fancied the water was more than commonly disturbed; it was here and there flecked with foam and swirled in eddies. 'Surely the river must be in flood,' he said to himself.

A little way off a well-dressed young man was seated on a stone, fishing with rod and line.

William had no shyness. 'Why does the water make such a noise to-day, and be so rough?' he asked.

'Don't you know? It is from the falls. The river is always noisy here. It is louder higher up the stream.'

'Oh,' said William; 'what are the falls?'

'Indeed you had better go on a bit farther and see for yourself, my lad. But be careful how you go.'

The spirit of adventure was on the boy. He thanked the man and did 'go on,' until he stood still with amazement, for there the full river came leaping down, in broken falls, from rock to intercepting rock, some fifteen feet in all; but they might have been fifty for what the home-kept boy knew.

Strange is the fascination of living, leaping water. He stood there gazing spellbound, lost in admiration, listening to the tumultuous uproar, as the swift waters came rushing and flashing downwards, striking themselves against the rocks into angry foam that William mentally compared to suds when Ales was washing, only he never had seen washing on so large a scale. If there were finer cascades in the world he had not seen them. He was fascinated by what he did see, and lingered long.

'I wonder if Rhys or Davy ever saw these falls?' he said to himself; 'they never told *me*. They tell *me* nothing. But I will find out things for myself.'

The fisherman was rising from his stone when William again drew near. He had his rod and basket in hand prepared to go.

'Well, what do you think of the falls?'

'Oh, 'deed, and they was wonderful—and terrible. I was thinking how soon they would drown a man.'

'Yes, or a boy either. Which way are you going?'

'By the riverside, through the wood as far as the ford.'

'That will not be safe at this hour. You might slip into the stream. You had best go back the way you came.'

'I—I dare not,' stammered William.

'Dare not? Yet you are not afraid to go through these pathless woods by the riverside at dusk, though a false step might be fatal. Come along with me; I'll see you on a safe road.'

William followed through the ascending wood cau-

tiously as before, ready to brave anything with such a companion.

The sun had not set when they stood upon the heath above, and then the stranger inquired—

'Well, my boy, of what are you afraid?'

'Of going past the Druids' stones, sir.'

'So you are superstitious? What harm can a few old stones do to a stout boy like you?' was asked with a broad smile.

William felt half-ashamed of the confession, how he had been lost when quite little, and had seen the stones make faces at him, adding the current stories he had heard, and his fright that afternoon.

By this time they were descending a slope from the barren heath to the Merthyr Tydvil highway, thus avoiding close proximity to the dreaded circle, although the roadway passed on a lower level. As they went, the stranger did his best to disabuse the boy's mind of his foolish terrors, and gave him to understand that long before there were any Christian churches in the land, or any Christian clergymen, the Druids were the priests, the priests of Baal, and set up those stones for their temples. Yet he said nothing of their horrid rites or human sacrifices, lest he should confirm the boy's dread of the stones.

William listened with wide-open ears, putting in a question here and there, as was his wont, and, to his delight, receiving intelligent replies adapted to the capacity of a thinking child. He was very anxious to know something more about the priests of Baal, but,

after a brief identification of them with the idolatrous worshippers of the sun, the stranger, having ascertained that he could read, referred him to the Bible for further information.

They had reached the well-trodden turning to the ford. The sun had by this time set, and twilight was closing in.

'I presume our ways part here,' observed the tall stranger. 'Good-bye. Do not forget what I have told you. Brave boys who fear God, and do their duty to their fellows, do not dread the aspect of a few grey old stones.'

'I'm not afraid of stones, sir. I've got a heap, and I build with them. But Rhys kicks them over and says I waste my time.'

'So you build with stones, do you? And, pray, what do you build?' asked the gentleman, with a comical smile, unseen in the twilight. 'Do you think you could build a bridge over this treacherous river? You would do good service if you could,' he added, *sotto voce*.

William felt abashed. He had an uncomfortable suspicion he was being laughed at.

'I am only a boy, sir. I can only *try* to build. But when I am a man, Rhys shall see!'

'And who is Rhys?' put the other, resuming his walk when he found the boy did not turn towards the cottage by the ford.

'Rhys is my big brother. But, if you please, sir, what do be a *bridge*?'

Without evincing any surprise at the ignorance of a

boy of his class and age, who could not have travelled far from home, the other answered promptly, 'A bridge is a roadway built *over* a river so that people may walk or ride across without wetting their feet. Bridges are sometimes built of wood, sometimes of stone or brick. A bridge is sadly wanted hereabouts, my boy. I narrowly escaped being swept away at the ford this morning.'

William drew in his breath. 'Oh-h-h! Would a bridge have saved my father from being drowned?'

'It would preserve any one who had occasion to cross.'

'Then I'll build one when I'm a man, 'deed I will,' came promptly.

The stranger, amused by William's earnestness, put some few questions, in his turn, respecting his father's death, his name, and occupation, ascertained whence arose his peculiar fancy for building, and suggested that if the church had attracted him so much he should contrive to visit the ruins of Caerphilly Castle, which he would find much more wonderful as a building; adding that he would have to cross a drawbridge to get into the castle.

'Why, mother and Rhys go to Caerphilly market every week. They never told me of the wonderful castle, whatever! But I'll go myself,' cried William, his imagination fired, and his indignation rising under the supposition that he had been kept wilfully in the dark. It did not occur to him that familiarity had taken the wonder out of the ancient pile for his elders.

They had reached the foot of the steep ascent to the

farm, which William pointed out with some pride as his home, and there the stranger—who said he was on his way to the vicarage—took leave of him, saying that his name was Morris, and perhaps they might meet again some day, for he was interested in stone, but it was iron-stone and not for building. However, before he went, he gave the boy a word or two of advice.'

'Remember,' said he, 'you have a character to build before you think of building houses and churches, and a *boy* may begin to build that.'

'How?' was asked, William's grey eyes opening wide.

'By fearing God, and doing his duty. But there are bad characters as well as good ones, and every act of disobedience, of untruthfulness, of indolence, goes to build up the evil in place of the good.'

He had left William something to ponder. That was a memorable encounter.

CHAPTER XII.

CAERPHILLY CASTLE.

A COUNTRY vicar in the last century bore little or no resemblance to a clergyman of any status in this. He was a much more homely and patriarchal character, especially among the Welsh mountains.

Whatever his learning or his eloquence, he did not hesitate to till his own glebe-lands, or to perform offices from which the pastor of to-day would shrink as derogatory to his cloth. As a rule, his stipend was small, and necessity compelled him so to labour. He came, however, nearer to his flock in consequence.

When Mrs. Edwards, the Sunday following William's escapade, besought the Rev. John Smith to admonish her refractory son, who perversely and sullenly refused obedience to his eldest brother, idling and playing with stones when he should be at work on the farm, and wandering no one knew whither when reproved, she was surprised to hear him say—

'Um, ah, yes, I wanted to have a word with that boy of yours. But which am I to admonish, the eldest, who should set an example of brotherly love and consideration,

or the youngest, who resents what he regards as petty persecution and overbearing assumption?'

'Deed, sir, Rhys has only set a good example to the rest. He do work hard upon the farm all day, and teach them to read at night; and he do have a right to expect them to look up to him, and do what he tells them; for you see, sir, he do be grown quite a young man, and a good farmer too, look you.'

'Um, ah, yes, yes. I see. I understand all about it, Mrs. Edwards,' was the vicar's running comment; 'I'll admonish the offender,' the twinkle in his genial blue eyes, as he turned to accost another parishioner, puzzling her greatly.

However, as there was peace between the brothers for a considerable time, the widow congratulated herself on bespeaking the good vicar's interference.

She was not aware, for Rhys did not think proper to say, that, after asking him confidentially if the gossip he had heard about himself and William was true, and what were the rights of the case, the vicar, out of his own mouth, had convicted him of a want of brotherly kindness and forbearance, and had 'admonished' him to remember what a lazy lad *he* had been prior to his father's death, and had asked how he would have liked an elder brother to come hectoring over him in those days? In short, he read Rhys an informal homily on arrogant assumption, and the need to exercise a degree of lenity towards a brother so much younger, who was in all probability no worse than he had been himself. It was something like a pin-prick to an inflated balloon.

Rhys did not hold his head quite so high as usual when he joined Cate and her father at the churchyard stile; and was so quiet during the walk homeward that Cate tossed her hat-crowned red head about in offended pettishness, and Owen looked at him askance, wondering what the good vicar had said to take all the brightness out of him.

William was no less reticent. But, child though he was, he lived in a dream-world of his own, and had ceased to reveal his inner self on the domestic hearth, scared by the loud laughter and mockery that greeted his curious inquiries and precocious remarks.

In his silence, therefore, there was nothing to surprise his mother, who had fallen in with the general opinion that he was sullen. She had seen the vicar lead him aside, and took the reprimand for granted.

The opening words of his conversation with the nine years boy did not seem much like a reprimand.

'So, William, I hear you are going to be a great builder? And Mr. Morris tells me you want to know all about the Tower of Babel and Solomon's Temple, the Druidical temples, and St. Helen's Church here, with bridges and I do not know what beside. Now which of all these are we to talk about first?'

He had unlocked the boy's heart as with a magic key. Here was some one else who did not laugh at him. Their conversation lasted little over a quarter of an hour, and William was frequently the catechist, but it broke off like a serial story, 'to be continued.' And though it had been chiefly about building and builders,

the vicar had not let the boy go away without a few words of gentle advice on his duty to himself and others —a lesson referred back to the two tablets of stone delivered to Moses amid the fiery terrors of Sinai.

After that there was generally a Sunday morning chat in the churchyard, and on one occasion the vicar took the boy home with him to dinner, a distinction that puzzled Mrs. Edwards exceedingly, and made Rhys no less jealous.

The vicar, a small man surmounted by a big clerical wig, had simply shown the boy a few architectural pictures in illustrated books, with a brief description of his own, the letterpress being English, and the boy's education stopping short at Welsh.

There was a water-colour drawing upon the parlour wall of a ruined castle with a tower that had been rent from battlement to base, and appeared in the act of falling. It was too remarkable to escape William's observation. He eyed it intently for some minutes. At length he asked, 'What place is that, sir?'

'That? Oh, that is Caerphilly Castle, the oldest fortress in Cambria. Do you not know it?'

'No, but I mean to go there when the tailor comes to make me some proper clothes. The packman let me have the cloth for the stockings I have knitted, look you.'

'Um, ah. So you are in a hurry to discard the ancient Cymric kilt are you?'

'They make one look so like a girl,' was William's shamefaced answer.

'Yet there are grown men both in Wales and in Scotland who still cling to the kilt, and are proud of it. You will be for casting off the old Saxon smock-frock next.'

''Deed no, sir. Men wear smock-frocks, women don't. Rhys wears one and Evan too.'

But, ancient or modern, no sooner had William a chance of an exchange for a short-tailed coat and a pair of knee-breeches than he felt he had made a step towards manhood, much as Davy had done before him —Davy, who went plodding along from day to day and from week to week, with scarcely a thought that did not centre in the farm, and who never troubled himself about 'whys' or 'wherefores.'

'William is not at church to-day. How is that?' remarked the vicar to Mrs. Edwards on the Whitsunday, as he took his customary stroll among his parishioners in all the importance of his wig and three-cornered hat, noting each newly flower-decked grave as he went, and perhaps making a kindly remark in passing.

''Deed, sir, I thought he would be here. He was dressed before any of us. Ales said he was proud as a peony of his new clothes, and had gone off first to show himself. He do be a strange boy.'

'Did Rhys say anything to him about them?'

'Yes, sure, he told him that now he was being dressed like a man he hoped he would cease to be playing with stones like a baby.'

'Um, ah, yes, yes. I thought as much. You need not be alarmed if William is not home until late. I

can partly guess where he has gone. He is not doing any harm, my good friend. He is in much less danger than Rhys, I can assure you.'

Mrs. Edwards looked up in the vicar's expressive face, and following the glance of his pleasantly twinkling eye, her own rested on her eldest son, carefully handing Cate Griffith over the tall stile.

She knew nothing of electricity, but certainly something like an electric shock passed through her, with its instantaneous enlightenment. A moment she stood dazed, then turned to address the vicar, but he was gone, and talking with a grey-haired old couple of a son who had been lost at sea, who had no grave to be dressed with flowers that Whitsuntide.

William was forgotten in the newer care. There was no mistaking the attitude, the tender expression in the face of Rhys, or the coquettish aspect of the ruddy maiden as she placed her plump brown hand in his.

'Sure,' said the widow to herself, 'Cate could get over a stile without help. I've seen her climb a tree or get over a wall before now. *That's* why Mrs. Griffith's been so ready to let Cate come to the farm to help at harvest-time, or whenever we were pushed. I see it all now, and the fear lest she should go home by herself after dark, as if the road did not be straight enough. And him a boy, not twenty yet. What do the woman be thinking of? Do she be thinking I would let Cate come on the farm as Rhys' wife, when Ales and Evan get married? Oh, Rhys, Rhys, and me a widow with three younger ones to rear, look you!'

Jonet and Davy, standing close beside her, during her brief colloquy with the vicar, had no clue to the significance of his hint or his glance; but they could read the trouble on their mother's puckering brow, without suspicion of its cause.

'What be the matter, mother?' asked Jonet anxiously, sidling up to her and slipping a small palm into the larger one. 'Do you be uneasy about Willem?'

''Deed, Willem's all right. The vicar said so. You need not fret over him,' said Davy placidly. 'He will be gone to show Robert Jones his new clothes.'

'Yes, yes, sure, that will be it,' assented the widow, smoothing her ruffled countenance with an effort, unwilling to share her discovery with either Davy or Jonet, although the former was by this time quite as old as Rhys had been when he felt himself entitled to assume a general protectorate of the family.

Taking Jonet by the hand, she made her way across the churchyard more hastily than usual, barely nodding in recognition of an acquaintance who advanced a step or so in expectation of a chat. Her desire was to keep Rhys and Cate in sight, and so confirm or dispel her newly-aroused suspicions.

But there were others before her at the stile, a father and mother, with three or four young children, to be helped up the steps on one side and down the other, and by the time her turn came, Rhys and the Griffiths were well in advance, and lost to sight by a bend in the road.

Davy was always inclined to saunter along, and Jonet, however brisk at starting, began to drag heavily after

the first mile on the return, encumbered by her Sunday shoes.

For all that neither William nor Rhys were at home when they got there, and the rare Sunday's dinner of boiled meat and potatoes was on the table, with buttermilk to wash it down, before the latter came hurrying in, his cheeks aglow.

The uneasy look on Mrs. Edwards' face had not been set aside with her hat and cloak—worn in all seasons on account of uncertain skies—nor had she found it as easy to conceal her displeasure with a smile, as it was to cover her best linsey-woolsey skirt with a fair linen apron.

'Has not Willem come in?' asked Rhys, glancing round the kitchen.

'No!' said his mother curtly, 'and *you* have not been hurrying yourself.'

'Owen Griffith kept me talking about the success of his new crop of potatoes. He says that his brothers, and Roberts, and Lloyd are all for trying them next year.'

'Potatoes, indeed!' his mother jerked out, and he looked up at her. But he set her evident ill-humour down to the absence of William, as did both Evan and Ales.

And where was William rambling that bright Whitsunday morning, when he should have been helping his mother to dress his father's grave with flowers?

Had he gone, as suggested, to parade his manly suit before his friend Robert Jones?

Not he; that would hardly have accounted for his absence from church, since the turf-cutter's cottage was on the direct road-side.

No. When the vicar was giving out his text, William Edwards was studying a 'sermon in stones,' his text being Caerphilly Castle, and he standing in blank awe and amazement beneath the barbican towers of the only drawbridge time has spared out of the original thirteen, much as he had stood in infancy overpowered by the comparative vastness of Eglwysilan's church when he was first brought face to face with it.

And now it was but a dumpy boy of nine who stood transfixed by that approach to a stronghold, 'of which the very ruins are stupendous,' a boy unread in history, who knew nothing of the Romans, or of Beli Gwar, or of Robert Fitzhamon, or of any of the conjectural first-founders, or of Edward the First who added so largely to its strength and size. He could see that it stood encircled by water in a wide plain surrounded by dark and barren mountains, but had any one informed him that it occupied an area equal to Windsor Castle he would have been no wiser, never having seen a castle before, or heard of any Windsor except the lord of the soil around his home.

With mountains he was familiar. Their grandeur did not oppress him. They were the work of the infinite God who made the whole world, who set the sun and the moon and stars high in the heavens to give us light. The creation of the universe by the Almighty hand was no new idea in the boy's mind. But that men, only

men, should have put that vast pile together, its towers, its massive walls that had outlasted hundreds of years, was suggestive of possibilities and capabilities that took his breath away.

He stood there long, not so much because he was tired with his five-miles' rough walk that hot morning, but to overcome his first sensations of awe. Then he passed between the two great towers, and traversed courts and alleys, citadel, hall, chapel, whatever the pillared areas, the vast walls and arched windows, may suggest to antiquaries. To the boy they suggested only a marvellous enigma it was his fixed determination to solve *some* day.

In his explorations he had to scramble over the fragmentary ruins of a second drawbridge between flanking towers, over which the friendly ivy had thrown an evergreen mantle. Here he stood gazing astonished at the mass of solid masonry which had walled the castle in, and at a great arched gateway under which he passed. He groped his way down to an underground chamber where had been a smelting furnace and a mint; and from that wonder of wonders, a staircase to the turret-top.

But nothing held him so spellbound as the leaning tower, which, with chambers and passages complete, and outer walls full ten feet thick, overhung its base nearly four yards, a threatening mass that so had hung in mid air since the convulsion that had rent the tower in twain centuries before, yet held aloft as surely as the tower of Bologna or of Pisa.

Nothing knew William of these, or of battles or sieges,

or of the force of water let in on molten metal; but he could wonder how the stones held together, and he could argue with himself that what had been done might be done.

Aladdin's enchanted garden of precious stones was nothing to what Caerphilly Castle was to the boy William Edwards.

CHAPTER XIII.

MAN PROPOSES.

ALTHOUGH, being warned by previous experience, William had stuffed his new pockets with bread before leaving home in the morning, he found that was a sorry substitute for a hearty dinner, and when he limped home in the waning light of the long summer evening, supper at the farm was over and cleared away. It was a doleful prospect, for there was an aching void in his interior that all the wonders of Caerphilly Castle had not served to fill.

He had left home jauntily enough in the morning, but give any lad of his years a ten-miles' walk on a hot summer day, on a rough road up hill and down dale, and add a couple more miles of scrambling over ruins, and I venture to say all the jauntiness would be taken out of him. He would look as dusty and limp and jaded as did William Edwards, and his secret enthusiasm would not prevent a wistful look at the table, bare of all save crumbs and milky rings where mugs had been.

Rhys had stood propping up the door-post as he ascended the stony lane, and entered the enclosure in front of the house by the stile.

'What do you mean by coming home at this time of night?' he cried sharply, catching his brother by the shoulder. 'Where have you been all day, you vagabond, wearing the shoes off your feet?'

'I've not been after Cate Griffith,' was flung back in retort, and, as if a stone had struck him, the grip of Rhys on the shoulder relaxed, to let the 'vagabond' pass in.

The empty table was not more expressive to him than was the averted countenance of his mother, who sat on the high-backed settle, her brow clouded, her unseeing eyes steadfastly gazing at the low hearth where the embers were smouldering into white ashes. Probably she did not see him as he dropped wearily down on a three-legged stool opposite.

Davy sat at the table, half asleep, his face hidden on his folded arms. Evan was busy in the farmyard. He could hear his wooden shoes clattering over the stones. Ales was going in and out.

Jonet, who had been watching for William's return, with her light-brown head and half her body stretched out of the bedroom window, came noiselessly across the wide kitchen. Her arm stole lovingly around his neck. 'You are tired, Willem; do you be hungry?'

He gave her hand a squeeze and nodded. Her bare feet were off towards the dairy.

There was a whispering in the passage. In a few minutes Ales brought in a mug of buttermilk and a great hunch of brown bread.

'Here,' she cried, 'eat that; though you don't deserve it, going off no one knows where.'

He thanked her for the unhoped-for supper, but he did not tell her where he had been, though he knew she had an old mother living somewhere in Caerphilly. Whereabouts he did not know, and, having no news of the poor rheumatic old woman, he munched his bread in silence.

His mother never raised her head. If she saw him she made no sign. Rhys had been away all the afternoon. That lay heavier on her heart than any wanderings of William, though *he* thought otherwise. There was no red-headed Cate lying in wait for her youngest born—no one seeking to steal his heart away from her. She was hesitating whether to take Rhys to task, or, as Ales suggested, to 'wait and let the waters pass.'

But Jane Edwards had not a passive nature. She was more inclined to be up and doing than to wait. 'Yes,' she communed with herself, 'the waters may pass, but they may carry my Rhys with them. I want no Cate ordering about here; the artful jade!'

As if the very thought had been a stimulus, she rose abruptly, and, passing out into the moonlight, joined her son, who was bending over the low stone wall, looking intently down the rugged slope.

'What are you looking for, Rhys?'

He gave a sudden start as she went on, 'Do you be watching the moonlight on the river, and thinking how different was the night that took your father from us?'

She put her arm within his as she spoke, and laid her head, in its white linen cap, against his shoulder.

'Ah, Rhys, that was a terrible time, a terrible time.

But, thanks be to God, we won through it. And it made a man of you, my dear boy. Well do I remember how you came to comfort me, and promised always to be a good son, and do your duty by me, and by the children, and by the farm, in the sight of God. And you have always done it, Rhys, *fach*, always— And—and—it would be breaking my heart, Rhys, if—if—you should be caring more for some one else than for your promise—or for your mother—and—and for Jonet—and the others.' And there she paused, but he made no response, and she continued.

The latter half of the sentence was sobbed rather than spoken, and Rhys, who had a tender heart, notwithstanding his contempt for William's day-dreams, was deeply moved by her emotion.

For the moment, Cate and his own day-dreams were lost sight of.

'Mother, dear,' said he, not perhaps so truthfully as might have been, though he felt at the time that all he said *was* true. 'Mother, no one can ever come between us, or make me forget my old promise. What makes you be thinking so to-night? Have I not done my duty so far?' And now his strong arm went round her with more than the old protectorate.

'Yes, yes, indeed, Rhys, you have always been a good son; but—but—you have been something different of late—and—I thought, perhaps, Elain Lloyd—or—or—Cate Griffith might have been looking out for you, and for stealing your heart away from us all, look you.'

He began a fresh disclaimer at the mention of Elain

Lloyd, but stopped short, and she could feel him wince and hold his breath when the name of Cate Griffith followed.

The denial died upon his lips. There was a pause. Early or precipitate marriages are not common in Wales. The consent of parents must first be obtained, and he had not yet spoken of marriage to Cate, but he knew the anticipation lurked in both their hearts, and there was a momentary struggle between two loves—two duties.

His mother's emotion had moved him as no angry words could have done, and so moved him that at the moment he would have given up Cate or any one to console her.

'Yes, yes, mother, *fuch*; Cate is a nice girl—and we are very good friends, the best of friends; but you need not be afraid; I am not going to bring her, or any one else whatever, to disturb you, indeed no.'

If there was a mental reservation, 'at least not just yet,' the words were unspoken.

And so, with a kiss of peace between mother and son, the disturbing spirit was laid at rest.

At rest—that was, on the surface—and for the time being.

True to his promise, and with an unappreciated effort, Rhys confined his attentions to Cate to the walk home from church, and was apparently less desirous to loiter with her in the rear of her parents. With commendable self-repression—seeing that his own inclination ran counter to his filial bond—he found occupation on the farm when otherwise he might have had an

errand that should take him across the shallow brook and past the weaver's cottage. Or, if he had really business that way, he showed less disposition to linger at open door or window.

Cate resented this with pettishness, and the transference of her winning smiles to Robert, the young brother of Elain Lloyd, until the coolness became coldness mingled with pique, and the two passed each other at church or on the road with affected indifference.

Had there been an absolute quarrel, it might have spent itself in reproaches, or been made up when the storm-cloud had passed, but this unexplained reserve went on for months and months, and the breach continued open.

Mrs. Edwards ought to have been satisfied with the result of her interference, and for a time she was. But somehow the temper of Rhys had not improved. His assertion of mastership became more pronounced. He and William came into frequent collision as the weeks and months rounded into years, and the harmony of the household was disturbed. Jonet appealed to her mother against his dictatorship, and even Davy roused from his passivity and objected 'to be ordered about like a hired labourer.'

There was no denying that Brookside Farm had materially improved under the new system of cropping and manuring Evan Evans had introduced, or that half the farmers in the parish had begun to plant potatoes since the root had proved so profitable there. Then

there was land under cultivation that had formerly lain waste, and Mrs. Edwards was no longer in dread of the rent-day, or of Mr. Pryse, let him scowl as he would.

She was always ready to give Evan the credit, and to pay him well for his services. But her eldest son, having profited by the man's instructions through a succession of years, began to think himself wiser than his teacher, and either argued against or disapproved most of his suggestions, whether for the cultivation of the land or the treatment of the stock. Rhys had been a mere boy when Evan came upon the farm, and the others quite children. It was scarcely likely that he who had seen them grow up was to submit to the young fellow's rule as if their ages were reversed.

Night after night, when Evan and Ales sat up together courting after the rest were in bed, as was the old custom, he would talk over some fresh slight or indignity received from Rhys, and declare his intention to quit the farm and get married at the next yearly hirings.

"'Deed, and it is not that I would like to be doing Mrs. Edwards an ill turn, in taking you away before Jonet is old enough to supply your place, in some sort, Ales, *fach*, or in going and leaving Rhys to do as he likes; but I am too old to be ordered about and taught my business by him, whatever. His good mother did never be doing it—and it's time we was be thinking of that little cottage at Castella, with the nice bit of land that would serve for a pig and a cow. We would soon

be wanting another field and another cow, Ales,' and we could have your mother over from Caerphilly to live with us—yes, indeed.'

'Yes, indeed, Evan; but I do be thinking Jonet do not be strong or tall enough to lift the dasher of the big churn, and it would come hard on Mrs. Edwards if she did be having to make the butter come. We do better be waiting a bit longer, or there's Rhys would be bringing Cate Griffith here to plague his mother's heart; yes, sure.'

And so from time to time it was proposed, and from time to time put off, Evan growing more and more dissatisfied at being thrust into the background, until, at length, when nearly three more years had spun their uneven thread, Ales consented to quit Brookside for the cottage at Castella, and Mrs. Edwards, weary of adjusting differences, endeavoured to persuade herself that now her sons and her daughter were growing up around her, they should be able to manage well without them, and, indeed, save something in food and wages.

At the first announcement of their decision, Rhys brisked up wonderfully. He shook Evan by the hand as if there had never been a difference between them, and congratulated him on his sensible choice, and on his prospect of happiness, with quite friendly interest.

William was the only one at all depressed by the proposed changes. Evan and Ales had frequently stood between him and overbearing Rhys; he had become attached to them, and felt he should lose two good friends when they married and went away. So there was a note of regret in his congratulations.

The thatched cottage at Castella was taken, duly whitewashed within and without, and the earthen floor relaid and left to harden. But Evan had promised Ales that she should have glass windows, and for these, and for his farming implements, he would have to make a journey to Cardiff. He had engaged a local carpenter to make a bed, a wooden settle, a table, and platter shelves. Ales herself had a pretty fair collection of useful articles in the shape of pots, bowls, and mugs, stowed away in the barn, having added to her store whenever the packman came his rounds. And she had, besides, a goodly pair of thick blankets, of which she was not a little proud, having spun the wool in spare hours when her other work was done, to say nothing of flannel and linsey-woolsey for wedding garments—underlinen was then and there of no account. Mrs. Edwards had promised Ales a new felt hat and a shawl for the auspicious occasion, and they bade fair to make a good start according to the ideas then prevailing. It would be thought little of nowadays, when art has found its way into the humblest abodes. But what had never been known or heard of could not be missed, and the absolute wants of nature are really very few.

As their yearly servitude happened to terminate alike at Martinmas, Mrs. Edwards kindly proposed their continuance on the farm whilst Ales completed some needful preparations, and Evan made his important journey to Cardiff. The wedding was to take place soon after his return, for the Rev. John Smith had been notified, and read out the banns, for the first time, on

the last Sunday in September, the faithful pair looking down and blushing crimson as the eyes of the whole congregation turned towards them.

They left the church together, feeling half-married, nothing doubting that the ceremony would be completed three weeks later.

But they had calculated without Mr. Pryse.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHERE IS EVAN?

THE difference between a full-face portrait and a profile is not so great as the different aspect the same individual may present to different people. To his noble employer, Mr. Pryse was the very beau-ideal of a shrewd business man,—clear-headed, active, and indefatigable in his interests and that of the large estate under his control,—a man on whom he could rely, for dealing conscientiously alike with himself and his tenants, in his absence.

Those tenants saw only a hard, grasping, unscrupulous agent, who extorted high rents, made no allowance for bad seasons or failing crops, and who stifled complaints with an extra turn of the screw. They knew that all repairs and improvements, made at their own cost, would be wrested to the advantage of the noble landowner in the long-run, and were disheartened. There was an unwhisperable suspicion afloat that these said repairs went down as deductions from rents in the accounts submitted to his lord; but who ever had a chance of overhauling those ac-

counts, or questioning crafty Mr. Pryse's unimpeachable integrity?

And about the time when William Edwards first found his way to Caerphilly Castle, which was in the year after George II. ascended the throne, the first faint breaths of a graver suspicion were wafted northwards, from Cardiff, in unaccountable and mysterious undertones.

Cardiff, now a flourishing and busy seaport, was then, in spite of its great castle, but a small, mean, and unimportant town, hardly to be called a port, its ancient prestige having fallen away like its gates and walls.

But about this period Mr. Pryse ceased to collect his lord's rents regularly at Caerphilly, and required that they should be brought to his office in Cardiff. This was a woful grievance to the bulk of the tenants, especially to elderly or infirm persons, or others remote from the county town. Had his lordship been at the Castle, no doubt his irate tenants would have sought his presence in a body, and made common cause against the common oppressor; but no such opportunity occurred.

Neighbours who dreaded the toil of a nineteen or twenty miles' journey along bad roads in bad weather, with Mr. Pryse at the end, and as wearisome a return, would meet and agree to trust the bravest of the party with the separate rents of two or three, having no fear of robbery by the way, whilst so many other travellers would be fallen in with, all bent on the same errand.

Some of these adventurous wights, who had never been so far as Cardiff in their lives before, brought back the news, either gathered on the spot or on the road, that a strange craft had begun to frequent the river, and to anchor off the old sea-wall. It was said that the vessel had been a privateer during the wars of the previous reign, and that although she came thither ostensibly for coal from his lordship's collieries, and Mr. Pryse was in close communication with the captain, there was something rather mysterious about her cargo.

It was darkly hinted that the barrels which came pannier-wise on long strings of horses from the Caerphilly colliery laden with coal, and were hauled on board to be emptied, were not returned empty, but, when again slung across the backs of the patient beasts waiting on the old quay, seemed no lighter than before; and knowing ones surmised, from the care with which they were handled, that smaller kegs were slipped inside the open coal barrels. At all events, it was whispered that the teamsters lingered long at roadside inns, and that some of them struck into by-ways instead of making direct for the colliery with their empties. And it was certain that foreign spirits could be procured by the initiated where only *cwrw da* or cider had been hitherto obtainable.

This had been going on for three years when Evan, the bridegroom-expectant, prepared for his journey to Cardiff, whence he proposed to bring Ales her golden wedding-ring, as well as a number of small articles—not in-

THERE WAS SOMETHING RATHER MYSTERIOUS ABOUT HER CARGO.
—*See page* 164.

cluded in the 'furnishing list' of cumbrous goods—to be ferried across the river for after-conveyance to his new cottage.

To Mrs. Edwards the enforced journey to Cardiff for the payment of rent had been a trouble and a grievance. She had not cared to send hot-headed Rhys by himself into a town which she pictured as full of temptations for young men, neither had she cared to go thither alone. Twice had she taken her son with her; once she had made the toilsome journey in company with Owen Griffith; at other times she had entrusted him with the rent-money. But now that Evan was bent thither on business of his own, her natural thrift suggested the employment of him as her deputy, so as to save the toil of the journey, and innkeeper's charges for herself and her beast.

Owen Griffith, too, was glad of a trustworthy substitute; so that when Evan kissed Ales, and shook hands with the rest as he bestrode good old Breint at the farmhouse gate, he carried a goodly sum under his new frieze riding-coat, in one pocket or other, nearly all the savings of Ales, in addition to his own, and the two rents.

His departure was quite an event. Owen Griffith and Cate had walked up the hill to hand him the money and see him off, though the hour was early, and a drizzling rain had begun to fall. But rain was no new thing among the mountains, and nobody cared for that, though, doubtless, they would have preferred fair weather as more auspicious.

However, Ales flung an old shoe after him, and called out—

'For luck, Evan!'

He looked back over his shoulder to nod his thanks in reply; whereupon she threw her apron over her head and ran into the house ready to cry because he had 'spoiled his luck' by looking back.

Mrs. Edwards, too, would have been better pleased had he gone on with face set forward, but she cried, 'God keep him, and bring him safe back!' as if to counteract the untoward prognostic. Yet a cloud was gathering on her own brow, for though Owen Griffith walked beside the horse down the stony incline, Cate remained leaning against the stone gate-post talking earnestly with Rhys, the flush on her countenance deepening as he bent his head and lowered his voice to meet her ear only.

'The bold-faced huzzie!' the mother ejaculated to herself, as she turned to go indoors. 'Can she not let Ales get out of the house before she be coming a-seeking Rhys to worm herself in! Sure, and she do be in a mighty hurry to make up the old quarrel, and secure Rhys, and Owen do be as bad as his girl. But Ales is not gone yet!' she jerked out half-aloud, then checked herself, wondering what could have put those ill-timed words into her head.

She was mistaken. Cate Griffith was not quite so bold as she imagined. The quarrel had been made up some weeks, and, what was more, made up by Rhys, with a plain-spoken offer to make her his wife when Ales was married and gone away.

What he had been saying, as Evan rode away down hill, was singularly enough, 'We shall not have long to wait now, Cate, darling. Ales will soon be gone, and mother will be missing her so much she will be glad to see me bring so clever and smart a wife home to fill the vacant place. Jonet could not do it. No, really! We shall not have long to be waiting, Cate, *fach*.'

'The best laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley.'

Centuries before Burns crystallised the sentiment into verse its profound truth had been established. Who, besides Noah and his family, calculated on the Deluge?

Were the tears Ales shed, when her long-loved Evan turned his head, premonitory of another deluge?

She was a strong, healthy young woman, not a puling sentimentalist afflicted with 'nerves.' She might well cover her face, ashamed of her starting tears, when he would be back with her in four days—or five, at the furthest!

Yet she was unaccountably restless those days. The outdoor work of the farm went on pretty much as usual, though the weather was unsettled. Rhys and Davy were thrashing and winnowing in the barn, and William, endeavouring to do the work of two, fed and foddered the cattle, and took the place of Ales at the churn, whilst she washed and ironed, and put little finishing touches to her simple wedding

finery, sighing, every now and again, for the Evan she missed every hour of the day. When candles were lit, and at meal-times, the blank caused by the absence of his smiling face and good-humoured observation, was felt by all, from Mrs. Edwards down to William.

And somehow, as the days went by, Jane Edwards began to share the fidgetiness of Ales, and, when the fourth passed, and the fifth wore slowly away, could not help frequent ejaculations, such as, 'It's time Evan was here!' 'What do be keeping Evan so long?' 'Sure to goodness nothing's gone wrong!' Ales growing still and white, with a strange fear that began to creep about her heart.

Evan had gone away on the Monday morning. Ere nightfall on Friday, William slipped out and hurried to the ford, as if to meet him, passing Owen Griffith at the foot of the hill, on his way to the farm to express his own surprise at the messenger's delay.

William waited and waited, but there was no sign of Evan. He got back to hear Griffith questioning Ales as to the various business her sweetheart had on hand, the conclusion being that he had not been able to make all his purchases, or get them conveyed to Castella, as readily as he had calculated, and that he must be allowed another day.

But Saturday came and went without a sign of the traveller, and Ales seemed to feel the alarm of all in her own aching heart.

Neither Evan nor Ales was at church on the Sunday to hear the banns read the second time.

But people were there to testify that Evan Evans had reached Cardiff in safety, and had been seen to enter the office of Mr. Pryse.

On that, Owen Griffith and Mrs. Edwards breathed more freely. Their fears that he had been waylaid and robbed were set at rest. It was clear his own affairs had alone detained him.

William, on his own inspiriting, had betaken himself to Caerphilly, and brought Ales back the comforting news that her Evan had carried the basket of butter and cheese to her old mother, and arranged for her removal to Castella with them.

So far all was right. But when another week went by, and no Evan came to claim her, or to bring the rent receipts, the heart of Ales sank lower and lower; every whisper in the house was suggestive of doubt, and pierced her bosom like a stab.

Owen Griffith was there nightly making fresh inquiries, often bringing Cate along with him, when Ales' heart was wrung with undertoned suspicions of her true love's fidelity — not to say his honesty.

At the three weeks' end, when the poor tortured girl had resolved on walking all the way to Cardiff, to set doubt at rest, the climax came.

It came like a thunderbolt, in the person of Mr. Pryse, to make an authoritative demand for the half-year's rent, then overdue.

It was in vain Mrs. Edwards declared it had been paid; that she had sent the money by Evan Evans.

'In that case you will have the receipt. Produce it,' said he, with a sneer.

'I cannot,' replied she, in much perplexity. 'Evan has not yet returned. But he was seen to enter your office; yes, indeed!'

'Oh yes, he did come to my office to pay your neighbour Owen Griffith's rent, and to beg a fortnight's grace for you. I have been good enough to give you three weeks, and now I *must* have the rent—one way or other.'

The evil smile of triumph on his wicked old face, as he said this, was lost on Mrs. Edwards in her consternation.

'Beg *what?* I did want no fortnight's grace. I did send the golden guineas!'

Mr. Pryse's thin lip curled. 'Then your man kept them. And it is rather strange he should pay Griffith's rent if he meant to make off with yours. There must be lying and dishonesty somewhere.'

'Yes, indeed,' broke from Ales, in a passion of indignant wrath. 'But not from my mistress or Evan Evans; they do both be God-fearing and true.'

An ominous scowl drew down the brows under the English three-cornered hat.

'Silence, you impudent jade, or I'll have you cast into jail for your vile insinuations. Wait until your *honest* Evan comes back before you venture to asperse

his lordship's deputy.' And he raised his riding-whip as if to strike her.

Rhys had come upon the scene in the midst of this altercation, brought thither by a word from Lewis, who had seen the agent ride up the hill, with a sinister smile upon his face, and a ruffianly fellow in his rear.

At once the hot-blooded young farmer, in a smock-frock showing many an earthy stain, interposed between his mother's faithful domestic and the steward, unawed by the gold lace or ruffles visible under the open riding-coat.

'Nay, nay, we don't take whips to women in Eglwysilan, Mr. Pryse. What is all this uproar about? And what do be your business here, sir?'

His mother attempted an explanation. Ales had shrunk back overawed.

'I have come for the unpaid rent, and the costs attending this application,' Mr. Pryse thrust in, heedless of Rhys' disclaimer that 'nothing was owing'; 'and, as no cash appears to be forthcoming, I take possession of the farm in the name of his lordship, and leave this man in charge of the premises, and I warn you against removing stock or stone. Take the inventory, Morgan'—to the man who had edged himself into the kitchen, and now put on a truculent air.

William had come rushing in from the potato-field, but he stopped short, as much paralysed as his elders.

His mother was the first to break the spell.

'Paid or unpaid,' she cried, with the dignity of truth and honesty, 'that wretch shall take no inventory here, whatever. I do not be without the means to pay your demand, though I protest that it is unjust, and will have to be returned to me when Evan returns with the receipt, look you.'

'Ah, *when he does.* But you may take my word for it, the bird has flown away with your golden feathers, and is far enough from Wales by this time.'

And again the sinister smile lighted the evil face, much as if he had good reason for knowing that Evan was far away, and that his word might therefore *be* taken.

'I am glad to see you are so well provided,' he added, as the widow proceeded to count out upon the table the sum demanded, leaving still a nest-egg in the grey stocking-foot. 'Your farm must be flourishing, and I herewith give you notice, in the presence of my man, Morgan, that your rent will be advanced ten pounds per annum after this date.—I will send you a receipt.'

'No, sir,' put in Rhys promptly, 'you will give my mother one now. I see your follower there has an ink-horn and paper.'

Mr. Pryse bit his under lip, but thought well to take the hint.

'And now, sir,' said Rhys, when he had assured himself the receipt was correct, 'you do be threatening

'YOUR RENT WILL BE ADVANCED TEN POUNDS PER ANNUM AFTER THIS DATE,' HE SAID.—*See page* 174.

to raise the rent. You cannot do that until the lease expires.

'Show me your lease,' demanded the agent loftily.

'We can do that when necessary, sir. His lordship will be having a copy you can consult,' replied Rhys quite as loftily.

And, seeing that he had a full-grown man to deal with, not a woman he could intimidate, Mr. Pryse turned on his heel, and mounted his horse, muttering something surly as he went, his disappointed functionary following at his heels.

Once again he bit his nails as his horse carried him down the stony track, for even the coin he bore away did not cover his baffled rage at defeat. Presently his thin lips spread into a smile of self-congratulation, and his eyelids nearly met as he communed with himself.

'It was lucky I did not call on Griffith for *his* rent first. I clinched the nail on Evan's dishonest flight in acknowledging *that*. A clever idea of mine his begging grace for Edwards' widow. Covers his call at my office. I suppose that forward jade is the woman he was going to marry. She will wait a long while for a husband if she waits for Evan Evans, look you. And as for that cock-crowing Rhys, I'll cut his comb before I've done with him. He shall not crow over me with impunity; no, indeed. I've bled the old woman pretty freely this time. She'll not get over it in a hurry. The farm will go to the dogs now that long-headed farming-man is gone. Lease, indeed! I

defy any power in earth or heaven to keep them on their farm when I am ready to turn them out. Yes, indeed!'

A strong defiance *that*, Mr. Pryse, crafty and potential though you may be!

CHAPTER XV.

A STOP-GAP.

AS soon as Mr. Pryse was gone, Mrs. Edwards sank down on the oaken settle exhausted with the conflict of disturbing thoughts, and the harassing scene in which she had just borne a part. The old stocking-foot, which had been her only possible savings bank all the years of her thrifty widowhood, lay, with her limp hand, in her lap, in a corresponding state of collapse. Only three weeks before it had been plump and pleasant to contemplate, a testimony to industry, and a pledge of future prosperity. Now, within those three short weeks, the full half-year's rent had been a second time withdrawn, with exorbitant costs in addition, and the residue had ample space to chink.

There was a troubled aspect of careworn bewilderment on her countenance as she sat there, gazing abstractedly on her diminished store, endeavouring to reconcile the irreconcilable. And all the while Rhys was pacing the kitchen floor, with noisy tramp, in his wood-soled shoes, chafing and fuming over the cruel insolence of Mr. Pryse, as well as over their loss, yet wondering vaguely if there could be any truth in his allegations.

He did not altogether trust Mr. Pryse, but he had never had his mother's unbounded confidence in Evan, and, as Owen Griffith had suggested, so much money in his hands all at once might have proved too great a temptation, or he might have got drunk and lost it, and been ashamed to return. (But Evan did not drink.)

Now and then a sharp, jerky expletive gave expression to his crude doubts and suspicions, but he could not wring from his mother any word to strengthen his suspicions.

'I do not be knowing what to think, Rhys!'—'Deed, Rhys, Evan has served us well, and Mr. Pryse is a bad man, your father said it.'—'Yes, indeed, it is a serious loss, but Evan helped us to get the money.'—'Yes, yes, Rhys, I do be aware you have worked hard too; but Evan, he did teach us new ways—and—after all,' she concluded, rising slowly to replace the depleted stocking in the coffer, 'we may thank God we had the money saved, or our farm would have gone from us, and we should have lost everything. Think of poor Ales, and don't be letting her hear you.'

Poor Ales! William had found her in the dairy, bent down over the tall churn, with her head on her bare brown arms, sobbing as if her heart would break, less for herself than the aspersion cast on her true and faithful Evan. She had shrunk away, not from Mr. Pryse's whip, but from an evil tongue and a threat that cut worse than a whip-lash.

Prisons were horrible dens before John Howard spent

his life in dragging their iniquities to light, and purifying their foulness. 'Jail' was a word to daunt the strongest, for everywhere tales were rife how unscrupulous power thrust innocent men within their pestilential walls to perish, for no crime greater than debt or unguarded words.

William comforted in vain.

'Jail, Willem! He said he would send me to *jail*, only for standing up for honest people. But he is a rogue, Willem—a bad, wicked rogue, Willem.' She sobbed and shuddered as she gasped out the words. 'Yes,' 'deed! it will be that cruel Mr. Pryse that do be robbing the widow of her money—and—and my poor Evan of his good name. Yes, sure, and me of my dear husband that would have been this day! Oh, Willem *fach*, my poor heart will be breaking.'

'Hush, Ales dear! don't say so,' implored the sympathetic boy, laying his hand tenderly upon her shoulder. 'Unkind words are hard to bear, I know'—and he sighed—'but nobody here will think Evan took our money and yours, and ran away from *you*.' (He might have altered his opinion could he have heard through the stone wall what Rhys was saying.) 'Cheer up; it will all come right when Evan gets back; yes, sure.'

Ales startled William with the quick, energetic way she flung up her head and spoke—

'Come back? He will not come back unless I can seek out what that wicked wretch has done with him.

Would he be so sure of it, or dare to come here to rob your mother—yes, to rob her—if he did not know what he had done to keep my Evan from me? He may have put *him* in jail to rot there. Oh!' (and she wrung her hands, brown and hard with honest toil)—'oh! or he may have had him *murdered*. He is bad enough for that!'

'Hush, hush, Ales! Mr. Pryse would hardly do that; though he *is* a bad man, and looked, oh, so wickedly pleased when he knocked down the Tower of Babel I was building. I'm afraid, Ales dear, he would not stick at much,' William added, after a moment's cogitation.

'Name o' goodness, boy! He would stick at nothing whatever!' she cried, rising to her feet, and taking her cloak from a peg in the storeroom outside the dairy. 'But I am off to Cardiff to find Evan, or search out the truth; and do you pray for me, Willem, that I may succeed, and that no harm may come to me before I do.'

'Stay, stay, Ales,' exclaimed William, catching at her cloak in the doorway; 'you cannot go all that way on foot, and alone, or at this time o' day.'

Her voice was strangely quiet and determined as she answered—

'The sun has not set. I shall reach Caerphilly before night, and can stay and rest with mother until morning.'

''Deed, now, you had best be staying where you are till morning, and you shall have a horse to ride on. And

if there is no one else to go with you, I will go myself, sure.'

After some persuasion, Ales consented to the first proposition, absolutely declining to accept his proffered escort, saying, 'Now Evan be gone you cannot be spared. And, now the money be gone, you must give up playing with stones, and work well to keep the farm from the sly old fox. Ah, sure, and the fox might be glad to catch the young goose near his hole. No, no, Willem, *you* must not run into danger. There be no need to break your mother's heart as well as mine. If God speed my errand I shall not be alone. Better God's arm than man's army.'

As her cloak went back to the peg, William slipped out through the farmyard, and was off down hill as fast as his legs would carry him. Davy and Jonet, returning from the potato-field where they had been industriously at work, undisturbed and unaware of the overwhelming trouble nearer home, called out to know where he was going; but if he heard he did not answer.

Supper—the old frugal meal of stiff leek porridge and milk—was on the table cooling when he returned out of breath, and whispered to Ales, as she carried out the porridge-pot, that their mutual friend, Robert Jones, had business of his own in Cardiff, and if she would join him at seven in the morning, where the roads met, she could ride all the way on one of his team. He did not tell her all he had said to enlist his old friend in her service, or how heartily the turf-cutter

had responded, or that the man's errand was chiefly on her account.

Robert Jones knew more of 'old Pryse' than she did, and hated him as sincerely.

There had been some previous talk between Ales and her old mistress about the young woman's continuation on the farm unless Evan returned to claim her.

'I'd rather serve you for nothing than go away before Evan's good name was cleared, 'deed I would. And it will be cleared some day, I know it will, whatever some folk may think.'

She had said this with a full heart, meaning all she proposed, but Mrs. Edwards was too just to accept service on such terms from a tried and faithful maid in her hour of deep affliction. Besides, she had a feeling that whilst Ales was there, well-trained and active, Rhys would have less excuse to bring Cate on to the hearth. Motives are always more or less complex.

The objections of Mrs. Edwards to Cate Griffith certainly were so. She would have conceded that 'the girl was good-looking, quick of foot, and ready of hand,' but she would have added also, 'ready with her tongue, and not quite straightforward in her ways.' Then, if she must be deposed by her eldest son's wife, she would have been better pleased had he looked higher, and gone courting where there would be a little money to come home with the bride. Cate would have none to bring.

With such feelings uppermost, she did not contemplate the temporary absence of Ales with too much favour, anxious as she was for some news of Evan and of her missing money.

Mr. Pryse had disorganised the work in field and house for the one day utterly. All was now behindhand. She was herself upset, and a woman far on the wrong side of fifty does not recover her balance too readily. The sudden departure of Ales at this inopportune juncture was another upset.

But she would not confess her weakness to Rhys, lest he should make it an excuse for bringing Cate to her assistance.

Yesterday — Tuesday — had been baking-day. In their trouble the oven had been allowed to grow cool, and the dislodged terrier, who had shown a set of angry teeth at Mr. Pryse, had gone back to his repose underneath it. The barley and oatmeal for the bread lay in the brown crock, as Ales had left it, with the bit of last week's dough in a bowl ready to leaven it. Mixing, kneading, and baking was not light work, yet it must be done. Thoughtful Davy had again driven away the dog from his hole in the ash-pit, and lit the oven fire in readiness.

Then it was *Wednesday,* the churning and butter-making day. How was she to bake and churn the same morning? for both required attention, and when once the long-handled dasher was set in motion, up and down it must go until the butter came, however long that might be, or all would be spoiled.

Jane Edwards, persistent as her children, was at her wits' end, but she could not call Jonet in from the field, for they were late in digging up the potatoes, and if the frost came before they were in the pits, the whole crop would be ruined.

Then dinner had to be thought of. It was a relief to her, whilst kneading the mass of dough, to hear Davy scrubbing away with a ling besom at the dinner potatoes in the stone hollow under the spring. But she heard the quick voice of Rhys recalling him to his field-work, and the passive 'I be coming,' which marked his subjection to his elder brother.

At noon, when her family came in to dine, expecting the Wednesday's meal of buttermilk and potatoes—still new enough to be something of a treat—though there was a pleasant odour of baking bread in the kitchen, and there were anticipations of a dough dumpling in the pot, there were unmistakable grumblings and sour looks because there was only fresh milk to go with the esculent root. (The difference is only to be estimated by a trial on a farm where the buttermilk is fresh.)

Jane Edwards was overtired, and lost her temper. 'You could not expect me to be baking and churning at the same time,' she jerked out angrily, feeling already warm with her morning's work.

Here was the opportunity Rhys had looked for.

'You had better have had Cate here this morning to churn. Then you would not have been so hurried, and our dinner would not have been spoiled.'

'Spoiled, indeed! I have seen the time you would all have been glad of hot potatoes and salt, without milk at all,' was retorted.

William and Davy rushed to the rescue, rightly interpreting the mother's frown. 'I'll stay and churn for you,' they cried in a breath.

'You'll do nothing of the kind. If those potatoes are not all in, and covered up, they will be ruined. There was a touch of frost this morning. And who's to do the milking?' said autocratic Rhys.

Jonet and William proffered their services, only to be rebuffed. This was followed by a sharp altercation between the two brothers, widening the existing breach, and — though William, out of consideration for his mother, who interposed, did not bounce off and absent himself as usual — it ended in the despatch of Lewis with a message to Cate, and the speedy arrival of the girl, as if she had expected the summons.

Mrs. Edwards was taking a loaf of bread out of the oven when Cate came in at the open door, and possibly set the harassed widow's red face down to the heat of the oven—not to her temper.

'Lewis do be saying you do be wanting me to churn. I shall be glad to help you any way, whatever,' Cate began demurely, just as if she had not exchanged a syllable first with Rhys over the wall by the gateway.

'Yes, yes, sure. Mr. Pryse stopped the baking yesterday, and Ales be gone to Cardiff, so we are late;

and I must have the butter ready for to-morrow's market.'

Cate had her hat off with the first words of assent; her bare feet tripped lightly across the stone floor. She obtained from the pot on the fire a pitcher of warm water, to raise the temperature of the milk, as deftly as Ales could have done, and presently the dasher could be heard plashing in the churn with regular beat, as if lifted by strong, firm hands.

Mrs. Edwards, washing up the dinner things, sighed heavily, as if only half-satisfied, for a new perplexity had arisen in debating with herself who should go to Caerphilly market on the morrow. Whether she went or Rhys, she foresaw the necessity for Cate or *some one* to remain and take the place of Ales. She, however, did not care to leave the girl as her own deputy with Rhys at home to come and go at will.

The question was still unsettled when Cate called out that the butter had come.

At once Mrs. Edwards stepped into the dairy, and, as if ready for all contingencies, bare-legged Cate snatched up a milking-stool and pail, and was off, singing as she went; while the other collected the butter out of the churn, washed, salted, and moulded it into shape for market.

Back she came in due time, the full pail on her head, the stool tucked under one arm, her knitting-pins clicking as rapidly as if she was unencumbered.

Mrs. Edwards, moulding her butter at the dairy

window, could but admit to herself, as she watched her cross the yard with light, firm feet, that Rhys might have chosen worse.

That night Cate remained on the farm. It was settled that Rhys was to attend Caerphilly market. He was to load the pony and sled with potatoes for sale —they were sure to fetch a good price, if only for seed, as other farmers were beginning to plant them. He himself was to go on foot bearing the egg-and-butter basket, since Breint, who would have carried all, was gone.

Cate was up before the lark. Milking was done, breakfast ready, and she, bright, brisk, and clean as a new pin by the time Rhys and the rest were ready for the morning meal.

She was certainly on her mettle, and Rhys could barely have reached the bottom of the hill before the relics of the meal were cleared away, fresh fire-balls added to the peat on the hearth, and she ready, as she told Mrs. Edwards, to take the place of Ales in the field.

William chuckled, and rubbed his hands together with glee, when he saw his mother so reinforced.

He whispered to Jonet, as she followed to pick up the roots he dug out, and remove the haulms, which really called for another hand.

Jonet nodded an affirmative.

'Mother,' he cried, 'if Cate will take the spade, you can sit still and remove the haulms as Jonet gathers them up. I've got some work to be doing that Rhys

will not let me undertake. He says I don't know how, whatever.'

He had thrown down his spade, and was out of the potato-field, overleaping a wall, before his mother had time to question or remonstrate.

Evan had kept his eyes here, there, and everywhere. If the troublesome goats butted against a wall, and displaced a stone, he repaired the breach at once to prevent further damage. Rhys had been less wary, and, in his obstinacy, would not allow his youngest brother to see or know more than himself.

Consequently, an old greybeard Billy had been allowed to make a gap in the garden wall, and, though driven away with a stout broom-handle when Ales or her mistress might be there to see, had played havoc among the English herbs and flowering plants she was at such pains to rear. Then Mr. Billy and his friends had tried their horns on the empty sty, now the swine were turned to feed in the autumnal woods, and had done some fine damage there.

If Cate handled a spade with the skill and vigour of experience, William handled the unhewn stones with the inspiration of genius and long practice 'in play.' And he worked as if his life depended on his speed and skill.

Rhys made a good market, and came home with self-satisfied complacence at a late hour, to sup and turn over his gains to his mother, along with the news of the day. But he had no chance of a private word with Cate, who had gone home with her father before eight

o'clock, well pleased to have earned the honest commendation of Mrs. Edwards, in addition to the customary 'payment in kind.'

Morning came, noon came, and afternoon was speeding before Rhys discovered that the broken-down wall and pig-stye were as whole and sound as when new.

He stood before the latter in blank surprise. He had given no orders for the repairs.

'Has Morgan the mason been here?' he bawled out after Jonet and William, who were off with milking-stools and pails.

'No,' came quickly back over Jonet's shoulder.

'Who has been at work here?'

No audible answer came back this time, but, with a wondrous twinkle in her expressive eyes, and an unmistakable grin on her face, Jonet pointed with outstretched arm, in silence, to the younger brother striding on well in advance.

It was a revelation to Rhys. His countenance fell. The wisdom of the world did not rest on his individual shoulders. He stood there amazed, hardly sure whether to be vexed or pleased, angry or grateful. Content he certainly was not. He had been slyly circumvented, and that was irritating, however necessary the repairs had been.

Into the house he strode in quest of his mother. He heard her at work outside. Here a fresh enlightenment awaited him. She was endeavouring to set her garden beds in order, behind a good firm wall. Her

task was no longer hopeless; she could sing over her work.

There was little need for Rhys to ask over again, 'Who hath done this?'

Still less need for frowns and sullen looks.

CHAPTER XVI.

DISCOVERIES.

ROBERT JONES was a childless widower when he first picked up little William crying in the lane, and gave him a lift on his donkey. He was much older than Ales, but he was not too old to wish he had as smart and capable a helpmate on his own hearth, where was only his half-blind mother to keep all things fresh and clean. Many had been the sharp play of words between him and Ales during her progress from girl to woman, and, had not Evan come upon the scene when he did, Robert would certainly have made a bid for her favour.

He was one of the first to perceive that the younger man had quite spoiled his chances, and was generous enough to stand on one side, and keep his disappointment to himself.

So generous was he, that, instead of hailing Evan's mysterious disappearance with satisfaction, he stamped about and shook his fist at an imaginary 'old Pryse,' as he listened to William's recital, and proffered his services to 'poor Ales,' as if the recovery of her lost lover did not mean the extinction of the last spark of a chance for himself.

William could not have found for Ales a better safeguard on her way, or a more zealous and capable assistant in her anxious quest.

In fact, from the time they landed in Cardiff, and he found her a lodging with a dealer in peat, etc., who had her supplies from him, he took the business pretty well out of her hands, having, during their journey, made himself acquainted with Evan's errand and plans.

He argued with her that a strange young woman could not go about the streets of a seaport town—though, apart from castle and old monastery, Cardiff was but a very small place in 1733—without exciting attention by her inquiries, and defeating her own purpose, whether Evan was keeping out of the way, or was kept out of the way by others, even if she escaped personal insult.

Whereas he, well known, and with his customary load of peat to dispose of, could go from place to place and pick up, in gossip, without exciting the suspicion of Mr. Pryse, or any one else, facts which might be withheld from direct inquiry.

And so well did he fulfil his mission that, when the last rays of the setting sun crimsoned the river and the fading woods of the Taff Valley on the Friday evening, Ales, weary and dispirited, but no longer ashamed, rode up the stony hillpath to the farm, on the back of good old Breint.

Robert Jones had turned off towards his own home, with his team and his return load, after a very curious disclaimer of thanks.

Part of that load consisted of a new turf-cutting spade and a small glazed window for his hut. His newly-discovered need for these took him among dealers in hardware and carpenters, until he found what else he went for. He drove hard bargains, and paid in part with winter store of peat; but he carried away more than the dealers supposed. In the one place he observed a full set of implements for husbandry put aside, and roughly labelled, 'Evan Evans, Castella, *Paid*,' and was told they had so lain, 'lumbering up the place,' for fully three weeks, the buyer not having turned up to claim them, although he had stated he intended to take them up the river by boat when the tide served.

A crusty carpenter, who had two glass windows exposed for sale, was glad to let one of them go as a bargain, seeing that the man for whom they were made in a hurry three weeks before had disappeared mysteriously, and not even gone back to his inn, on St. Mary's Quay, for his horse.

That bit of information about the inn had sent the turf-cutter tramping across the town with his beasts, sure, at least, of much-needed rest and provender, all houses of the kind, in those days of horseback travel and pack-horse conveyance, having ample stable accommodation.

A warm supper, more plentiful than dainty, had been supplied to him in the common room, odorous of tobacco-smoke, rum, *cwrw*, tar, and salt water.

Presently a voice he knew hailed him from out the smoke-reek.

'Do that be you, Robert Jones? 'Deed, you're the very man to tell the landlord here who owns an old horse left here three weeks ago by a farming-man, who called himself Evan Evans, of Eglwysilan, and went off without paying his score, look you!'

'Ah, how did he go off?'

'Queerly. He said as he was going to hire a boat to carry the horse and some goods of his, as he was be taking to Castella, across the river in the morning, but he never did come back here.'

'No,' chimed in the landlord, 'nor never did mean it, or he would not have been going off in the *Osprey's* boat, as he surely did.'

''Deed no! not if he did go of his own free will,' came from a feeble voice in a corner; 'but I've heard as'—

'Sure, and didn't Mr. Pryse be saying he was be running off with a lot of money?' again struck in the landlord, drowning the words of the previous speaker.

On this ensued a warm controversy, in which some dark hints were thrown out respecting the *Osprey*, and Mr. Pryse's connection therewith, all bearing on the strangeness of Evan's disappearance.

Listening Robert Jones had come to the conclusion that the landlord was under Mr. Pryse's finger and thumb, and cautiously made no comment. But he kept his eye on the owner of the feeble voice, and, when he went out, followed.

He had found the man shifty, timid, and unwilling to give an unspoken opinion to a stranger.

So, too, were the tarry loungers upon the quay the next morning.

'Evans *might* have been kidnapped and carried off against his will, the crew of the *Osprey* were a queer lot, look you; or he might be running away, as Mr. Pryse did say—they could not tell.'

Mr. Pryse might have frozen free speech, but Robert Jones had noted shrugs and nods more expressive than words. Then the application of two silver pennies to the palm of a timorous lad opened his lips to tell that he had seen a strange man, looking for a big boat, hustled into the boat of the *Osprey*, and held down whilst the crew rowed out to the schooner in the bay. And, when Ales herself discovered that Evan had bought both a wedding-ring and a brooch for her, the conclusion was obvious.

She had shed her tears in the three weeks gone. She returned to the farm in tearless, but gnawing, uncertainty as to her Evan's fate, yet proud of her ability to clear his honest name.

She was somewhat incoherent in her story, but Robert Jones an hour or so later backed it up with fuller details, and his own convictions.

'Yes, yes, indeed, Evan Evans did go about his business like an honest man. There be still the spades and things he paid for, and I have a glass window he left his God-penny[1] on. He would have kept all the money if he intended running away. No, no, he did be paying all the rent, Mrs. Edwards, whatever Mr. Pryse do say.'

[1] God-penny—a deposit.

'"Deed, it do seem like it. But why should he be "pressed" on board?' she queried. 'There be no war now.'

'Why should any wicked deed be done?' put in Ales. 'A bad man do have his reasons ready.'

'Yes, yes, and one evil head moves many evil hands, Mrs. Edwards,' added Jones, 'if, as is hinted by them as daren't speak their minds, Mr. Pryse do have dealings with the gruff captain of the *Osprey* for something fiery besides his lordship's coal. Then, smuggling a stout-limbed fellow or two on board might be winked at, if it was no part of the bargain. And I do be telling Ales not to think they would kill Evan. They want living men for sailors, not dead ones.'

'Then God may bring him back to me some time, and I will pray day and night for him. Yes, yes, though the day be long it will have an evening. And let not Mr. Pryse be thinking to escape—

> "'The later that God's vengeance is,
> The heavier far and sorer 'tis,"'

broke from Ales, her eyes and cheeks kindling as with a spirit of prophecy, as she hurried from the kitchen into the dark storeroom beyond to contend with her own agony in secret.

Then came a reckoning with Jones for Breint's keep at the inn (Ales had cleared Evan's score as a matter of honour), and whilst settling that with Mrs. Edwards, it occurred to him that her sons had pursued their occupations in uncommon silence during this statement of facts and fancies, especially Rhys, who seemed more interested

in disentangling the locks of wool he was combing by the fireside (his comb-pot on the hearth) than on disentangling what seemed an unaccountable plot against his mother's tried and faithful servant.

William, knitting a long blue stocking in the opposite corner, had put in an occasional word, but even he did not appear at ease.

Davy's wooden soles had been heard clattering outside along with sounds indicative of more care for recovered Breint than the absent Evan.

He walked in from the farmyard just in time for the supper of hot leek-porridge Jonet poured scalding hot into their bowls, not forgetting one for the turf-cutter, who sat down without apology, for the odour was appetising.

Again he noticed that Rhys and William preserved a sullen silence towards each other, and wondered what fresh quarrel there had been.

When supper was over, and he rose to depart, William followed him.

No sooner were they out of earshot than the boy began to lay bare his grievance in tones of wounded self-esteem.

'Look you,' said he, 'since Evan went, Old Billy has been suffered to butt at the walls, and never a stone had been put back to keep him from the styes, till they did be like to tumble down. So yesterday, while Rhys was at market, I did work till the sweat poured off me, and mended them all, thinking I would let Rhys see what I could do. And since he found out this afternoon what

I had been doing, he has never spoken one word to me, whatever. If I had knocked the walls down he could not have looked more surly. It's enough to make one run away, it is! And if it was not for mother and Jonet, I would be running away, 'deed I would.'

'Hush, Willem, don't be saying that; runaway sons make sorrowful mothers. Don't be thinking of doing anything rash, anything you cannot be asking the blessing of Almighty God upon. Perhaps you neglected something Rhys expected done, of more consequence than a dry wall.'

'Sure, Cate Griffith did be digging the potatoes. She could not build up walls. I do believe Rhys is vexed just because mother was so well pleased, and began to put her garden right that Billy and the pigs had spoiled. Rhys would have liked Evan better if mother had found fault with him.'

The boy's bitter attempt at self-justification was checked by his mature friend.

'Faults are thick where love is thin, Willem. You are only a boy and your brother is a man. It is not for you to go your own way and disobey wilfully. But I will look at your handiwork in the morning, when I bring the lime for the land; and, perhaps, be saying a word to bring Rhys to reason. Good-night, Willem. Go to bed peacefully. And don't be building up a wall of stony thoughts against your brother, don't.'

These were his parting words to the chafing lad, as they stood by the gateway, but, as he descended the hill in the full light of the moon, he said to himself, 'Better

repair a breach between brothers than build up a wall to repel a fancied enemy.'

It was in this spirit the man addressed himself to Rhys the next morning, whilst helping Lewis to transfer the lime from the panniers to the freshly-dug potato ground, and the unturned stubble of oats and barley. He said he had observed signs of discontent between the brothers the previous night, and on other occasions, and expressed a desire to know if any real cause for discord existed. It was so very serious a thing for brothers in one house to bicker and quarrel; small differences were so liable to grow into great ones, even to enmity and hatred.

Rhys listened uneasily, fidgeted, puckered his brows, and at last jerked out, 'Look you, Robert Jones, that boy Willem is the plague of my life. He will not take orders from me. And who else should give orders if I am to manage the farm? Davy and Jonet obey. But he do think of nothing but picking up stones and building; and that will not make a good farmer or till the land, or pay the rent. He was mending walls on Thursday when he should have been digging potatoes. We may thank Cate Griffith they were all up and safe from last night's frost. She took up the spade he threw down.'

'Ah, well, Rhys, all the world are not farmers. Cate's father is a weaver. I cut turf, and sell lime and culm and aught else, to turn an honest penny. But let me see what sort of a young builder you have on the farm. You know I do be going about the country and use my eyes, so I know good walls from bad ones.'

'Sure, they do be well enough for a boy's work,' half

contemptuously admitted Rhys, whilst pointing out the repairs in walls and sties.

Jones gave them more than a cursory examination.

'Yes, yes, Rhys. But they do be "well enough" for a *man's* work, that they do. The stones are well fitted and firm. You owe the boy thanks, not blame. Don't you be for thwarting Willem, or you may be spoiling a good builder to make a poor farmer. A sound fence is a farmer's friend. Let him keep your fences sound, and he will help to pay the rent, 'deed he will.'

'I don't see how.'

'Your eyes are blinded by prejudice, man. Would not a stray cow, or hog, or pony that found a gap ready, do more damage to crops in a day than you could repair in a month?'

This was not to be gainsaid. But when the turf-cutter urged William's claim to just consideration and recognition of his service, the pride of Rhys was up in alarm for his own authority.

'He is such a boy,' he argued.

'No more a boy than you were, Rhys, when you first tried to fill your dead father's place, and told your mother you were "old enough to do your duty." Have you forgotten that? Or are you *younger* than you were then?'

Whether he had forgotten, or did not choose to remember, he turned off with a light laugh, and the remark, 'I'm not doing my duty in idling here.'

But conscience is a mill that grinds at all hours, and unsought, and Robert Jones had set the wheels in motion.

'Willem,' said the peat-cutter to the depressed boy, just before he cracked his whip to set his unloaded team in motion downhill, 'if you build up your life as well as you have built up your garden wall, you'll do. It is firm and compact, and the stones are set evenly together. But strife between brothers is a bad foundation to build upon. And it is not for a lad of your age to be unruly, and oppose the brother who has so long been working for all of you. There is time enough before you to build walls or churches, or what you will; but you have none to lose if you would bind the bond of brotherhood around you, or lay the foundation of a Christian life, look you.'

William's eyes brightened, and his chest expanded under his Saturday's sullied smock-frock, as his early friend commended his handiwork, for

'Praise is pleasanter than honey,'

and hitherto he had not been cloyed with the sweetmeat. But his aspect changed. He did not relish the bitter dose of advice mingled with the honey, for his whole soul was in rebellion.

Yet, swift and sharp as the man's whip crack, memory brought back those other words to the same purport the stranger, Mr. Morris, had spoken long ago, and every hoof-beat of mule or ass seemed to hammer them into his brain.

Far down the steep hill were beasts and driver before William roused from his reverie, and rushed after them, shouting as he went. The man turned.

'What is it, Willem?'

'Can you teach me to count?'

'Yes, up to a hundred, in tens. That is the way I count my peat.'

'Oh, I can be counting that as I knit.'

'Ah, then, if you do be wanting to reckon properly, and do sums with figures, you had better be asking Owen Griffith; he do be clever at that. I will speak to him for you.'

''Deed, I would be so glad.'

Robert Jones was as good as his word. Owen's cottage was not on his direct road, but he did not mind going out of his way to do a kindness.

The weaver had just taken a finished web of blue flannel out of his loom, and sat smoking a long pipe on the bench outside.

After the first salutation, the turf-cutter began by saying, 'Have you seen the dry wall Willem Edwards have been building up so cleverly?'

'Sure to goodness, no. Yet he did always have a notion that way. I have heard Rhys and Cate be laughing over it many a time.'

''Deed, yes, Owen, but it's not to be laughed at. That boy have a head, look you. I've seen walls built and mended less securely by old hands before now.'

'Sure now! You don't say so? I wish he would come and repair mine. It's been tumbling down, stone by stone, waiting till Morgan the mason did be coming round.'

'Well, you ask Willem. And if you would be offering to teach him to reckon up with figures, he would be proud and pleased to build it up. 'Deed he would. He do just be asking me to teach him. But you go looking at that wall of his. Willem do want encouraging, not laughing at. He will build up more than a broken-down wall some day.—Shall you be wanting peat or lime next week?'

'Ah, yes; and if you think Willem can mend the wall you can bring a sled of stones as well.'

The next day, on the way from church, Owen Griffith got William by his side, and set him counting the trees by the wayside, and the sheep on the hills, as preliminary to lessons in arithmetic, but nothing said he of any broken walls.

He left that for the afternoon, when he and Cate walked up to the farm, ostensibly to learn what news Ales had brought from Cardiff.

Over all that he shook his head, uncertain what to make of it, though he said, 'It do look bad, it do.'

But there was nothing uncertain in his exclamation of surprise at the firmly repaired walls Mrs. Edwards showed so proudly as the work of her youngest son.

It led to the open proposal that William should restore his fences to condition in return for lessons in arithmetic, and to Mrs. Edwards' consent to that use of his time.

Rhys had strolled away with Cate to talk over

the deferred prospect of their marriage, and so did not hear of this arrangement until afterwards, when, for reasons of his own, he thought best to keep the peace.

It was the small beginning of greater things.

CHAPTER XVII.

PROPER TOOLS.

ALES had resumed her work on the farm, but not with the spirit and vivacity of old. She had been wont to sing over her work, and had a store of old Welsh ballads in her memory. But the song-bird mourned in silence for the mate torn away so ruthlessly, and, as weeks and months and years rolled on in the same drear monotony of hopelessness, her heart grew colder and heavier, and her prayers became as the very wailings of despair.

It cut her to the soul to hear Rhys grumbling, as he did, at the money filched from them to pay, not only the rent Evan should have paid, but the heavy costs of a seizure in addition; and she more than once resolved to quit the farm when the year expired.

Second thoughts, however, suggested that nothing would suit the young man better, and his very grumbling might have that end in view; for, once rid of her, he could seek the necessary consent to bring in a wife with a good grace.

He had not improved in temper, certainly. It had irritated him to hear William lauded for the very pro-

clivities he had held of so small account, nay, turned into ridicule.

It was no satisfaction to have a brother so much younger competent to enlarge and raise the walls of the sheepfold, as he did, before a second winter set in. What though a mason's charges were saved, was not the saving at the greater cost of his own supremacy?

And in the long winter nights when he and Davy sorted fleeces or combed the wool, or tended the dye-pot on the fire; when Ales taught Jonet to twirl the flaxen thread drawn from the distaff, so as to set the spindle dancing on the floor to the tune of the mother's industrious spinning-wheel, how it tried his patience to see William making figures and calculations on a board, with chalk or ruddle by the light of the candle, whilst the knitting-pins, which should have been earning money, lay idle by his side.

There are men ready to perform generous acts, who are flagrantly unjust, but cannot see it. Robert Jones had urged Rhys Edwards to 'be just.' He should have said 'be generous,' and Rhys might have responded to the appeal. He resented the imputation of injustice.

Yet he denied to his brother the meed of praise his service merited; he begrudged him the time to acquire the common rules of simple arithmetic; perhaps because he felt it was a step to something beyond his own attainment. He counted not the money saved in masonry as money earned. He might have been content had William been as passively submissive as Davy and Jonet,

but he found in him a spirit boldly daring to cope with his own, and it stung him to find the boy upheld in his resistance.

So years crept on. The third winter passed, the snows melted, the roads were free for traffic, the river sang a paean to approaching spring, the pink and brown buds were bursting into green, song birds were flitting and fluttering about the eaves and boughs, all was life and activity upon the farm. The *Osprey* had never again put into port at Cardiff, where Mr. Pryse bit his nails and snarled more cantankerously than ever, and nothing had been heard of Evan. Ales lost heart, she did not sing with the birds; but William, no longer snubbed, worked on the farm with the best, until another barrier rose between himself and Rhys, in the shape of another stone wall.

Hedges have now superseded walls in many parts of Glamorganshire; but at the date of this narrative, the fields and lanes were universally bounded by what are known as '*dry walls*,' and still they serve as fences on the uplands.

By 'dry walls' are to be understood walls built without mortar or cement, of irregular, unhewn flag-stones, so put together, so wedged in one with another, as to stand firm where a cemented wall might give way exposed to the high winds of those elevated regions, the very crevices allowing the blasts to pass through, and so reduce the pressure on the mass. Such are the walls in Craven and other parts of northern England.

Yet it is no uncommon thing for the coping-stones to

be hurled away in a fierce gale, or for large portions of such walls to be blown down, as came to pass on Brookside Farm that gusty spring.

Here was an opportunity for William to turn his talent to account and save his mother's pocket, as be sure he did.

So far, so good. Rhys made no objection, and Mrs. Edwards was well pleased. Davy had begun to feel proud of his brother.

But it so happened that Robert Jones, whose window had long before been fitted in by William, came to seek his services, not merely to repair a breach, but to enclose a portion of ground as a stone yard.

Rhys, then engaged sowing barley on last year's turnip ground, looked as black as two thunder-clouds rolled into one, and without mincing his words gave a decided refusal.

'Willem is not a public stonemason, Robert Jones. He is now dibbling in the potato-sets, and cannot be spared. You asked me to "be just"; do you think you are just in seeking to draw him away from the farm at this busy season?' and with a very strong oath he swore 'Willem should *not* build walls for him or any one else.'

But the leader of the peat-cutter's team happened to carry a resonant bell, as did the leading beast of all packhorse teams, in order to warn other teamsters, or the drivers of cattle or carriages, that the narrow roadway was blocked, and one or the other must wait in the nearest broadened space provided as a refuge until the

advancing team had passed and left the road clear. Such open grassy spots may still be seen in England's narrow by-ways, and there gipsies make their camps. Nay, even in the heart of busy London, old Paternoster Row is so provided with spaces where two carts may pass abreast.

The bell, set ringing through the clear March air with every motion of the mule's head, brought William leaping over runnel, ridge and furrow, and dividing fence to greet his old and true friend.

The voice of Rhys, ever loud and authoritative, now raised and vehement, reached William as he came bounding along.

'Who says I shall not build walls for any one?' he cried. 'I *will*, and no one here shall stop me. Do you think I mean to dig and delve all my life, and be labourer to you?'

'Labourer to me, you jackanapes? Do you think your intermittent labour pays for your sustenance? But if you quit the farm this day to go wall-building, you may quit it altogether. I am not going to wear my life away to support you in idleness. Cyphering at night, piling up stones by day, rambling off to Caerphilly Castle when you should be at work—what sort of labour do you call that?'

'Head-work; of no account with you. But, look you, I'll go and come as I please, and build walls if I please. And I don't be owning you for master. If we can but find the old lease, it may turn out the youngest son is heir and not the eldest. But let me tell you that for

the toss up of a silver penny I'd quit the farm for ever, only I know that's what you do be wanting. You would be glad to get either me or Ales out to make room for Cate. But while we stay, mother do be mistress, and shall be.'

For a moment Rhys seemed dumbfounded. Then he sprang upon his brother, and grappled with him as if he would have borne him to the earth.

The fifteen years lad was thick set and sturdy, and stood his ground well, but he was no match for the man of more toughened frame and indurated muscle.

It would have gone badly with the younger had not the turf-cutter interposed, and, by sheer force, thrust them apart.

'What!' cried he, 'are you two brothers so jealous of each other you would strive like Cain and Abel? Shame on you both! Would you bring death and sorrow on your mother's hearth once more?'

They stood panting, but abashed, as he proceeded—

'Surely, what with one loss after another—the rent money unaccounted for when Evan disappeared, the cruel bill for costs, the raising of the rent, the missing lease—the poor widow do be passing through a sea of trouble, with cares enough to drown her, without you two, who should be her help and comfort, adding to the load. Are you not ashamed?'

'It be Rhys' fault!' 'It be Willem's fault!' they cried simultaneously, alike moved by the reference to their mother, whom they loved with deep affection.

'You are alike to blame. Each one has some reason

on his side; but, let me tell you, lads, it is always the one most in the wrong who is the last to give in. Now, shake hands and be friends. I came here thinking to be doing you all a service, for it would pay better for Willem to be building walls than doing common field-work. But I don't be wanting to breed dissension between you, so I will be getting Morgan the stone-mason to build my wall.'

William's lips were set close.

The brothers looked at each other; Rhys wavered. The reference to 'better pay' had struck a vibrating chord in his breast.

'If'— he began.

'*I* will build your wall, look you, pay or no pay, Robert Jones. But you will not be wanting me to-day, whatever?'

'No, not until next week; but fair work must have fair pay. Yet, what say you, Rhys?'

Here was a loophole for Rhys to slip through. 'Oh, indeed, if you don't be wanting to call him off his work to-day or to-morrow, it may be managed.'

So it was amicably settled, and when the turf-cutter went his way, William was on his knees helping Rhys to gather up what he could of the barley spilled from his seed-wallet during their unbrotherly struggle.

It so happened that the following Sunday the vicar took for his text, 2 Peter i. 5, 6, and 7, dwelling especially on the last—'*And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity*'—in such manner that both Rhys and William took it to heart, imagining

he had heard of their antagonism, and was addressing his sermon especially to them. No doubt there were others in the congregation to whom the sermon might apply with equal force, but they two held their heads down, as if to hide the crimson flush that mounted to the roots of their brown hair, and fidgeted uneasily upon their high-backed seat.

Anyway that was the end of their open strife. And when, at the close of another week, William carried home to his mother, in good hard coin, more than double the hire of a field-labourer, reserving a very small portion for himself, there was nothing said by way of objection to his craze for building, or his efforts to attain a more complete knowledge of arithmetical calculation.

Few persons ever found their way to Brookside Farm except on business, fewer still cared to ask who kept the fences and outhouses in such good order; and though Owen Griffith's house was by the roadside, ordinary passers-by were not likely to stop and put such questions, even if they gave the walls a second glance.

But Robert Jones had become a thriving man of business. He had increased the number of his team, and still travelled the country round with culm and peat, and clay and lime. There was scarcely a farmer or cottager on all Eglwysilan mountain, or near it, who did not on occasion call at his place, either to carry away some of his necessary commodities, or to leave a special order. And these were the very men to whom fences were of importance, the very men to know a good, compact wall when they saw it.

Jones had a long head. He had a double motive when he began to deal in broken flagstone, and invited William Edwards to build up an enclosing wall for his stores. He knew the wall would attract attention, bring the self-taught young mason into notice, and help to sell his stone.

The event justified his far-seeing calculations. Before another spring brought William's sixteenth birthday, he was known to be the best builder of dry walls within a wide area, and his services were in frequent request.

There was no more snubbing under his mother's roof, for with a very small reserve for personal needs, he poured all his earnings into her lap as to a common store; and rising in estimation, he was thanked with heartfelt satisfaction, so material and so necessary were added gains to meet increased demands, extortionate Mr. Pryse, sneering and grinning at their inability to confront him with their lease, having raised the rent a second time, and threatened still harsher measures.

And no one now lent a more willing hand to any work upon the farm, when not otherwise employed, than thoughtful William, who saw with pain the streaks of white interlacing his mother's once black hair.

But William Edwards was not content to be a mere builder of dry walls. He looked at the masonry of the church and of Caerphilly Castle, and was conscious he had much to learn. How to enlarge his fund of knowledge was a problem. But he was not easily daunted.

One Sunday he observed a cow and sundry sheep

trespassing on the vicar's glebe, having taken a wide gap in the wall as an invitation. No sooner was service concluded than he marched up boldly to the vicar, reminded him of promised help, explained his desire to master higher forms of arithmetic than Owen Griffith had ability to teach, and modestly offered to repair the glebe wall if the vicar would accept his services. The Rev. John Smith smiled, and assented readily. William set to work upon the wall the next day, going into the vicarage parlour when candles were lighted, and making the best use of the privilege accorded. Long after the wall shut out four-footed intruders, William might be seen on his way to the vicarage, after a hard day's work, once or twice a week, a bit of candle stuck in a hollowed turnip serving to light him home when there was no moon.

It was about this time a gleam of stronger light shone on his darkness.

He was engaged enclosing a fresh field for a farmer about two miles from Caerphilly. Raising his head, and giving his arms a stretch, his attention was arrested by a noise there was no mistaking. There was a blacksmith's shop by the roadside, and almost in front of it a load of stones was being dumped down from a cart, or what then answered to the name in that wild region. It was little more than a sled, low to the ground, but running on broad wheels or rollers of solid wood, girthed with iron bands and drawn by four horses.

His curiosity was excited. A group of working men were there. What were they about to do? One man

was measuring the ground, the others, doffing their coats, rolled up their shirt sleeves, and also set to work.

A trench was dug along the lines marked out. And now two mules came up with laden panniers. William overleapt his own low wall and drew nearer to observe, his pulses beating rapidly. He was coming on the secret he had so long panted to learn.

A heap of sand was emptied on the ground, and hollowed out like a huge shallow bowl. Into this was poured lime from the other panniers, and then a man carrying a pail brought water from a wayside runnel and poured it on the lime. There was no need to tell whence rose that volume of steam to one who white-washed his mother's farm buildings so repeatedly. But the stirring up and mixing of mortar was new to him. And what was that soft fluff shaken out of a bag when the steam began to subside? It was something with which the wind made free and blew about almost like thistle-down—ay, almost into his own face. He caught a loosened tuft; examined it. It could be nothing but cow's hair. So that was how the mortar was bound together!

Anon began a chipping and ringing of steel upon stone, that was, and was not, new to him.

Nearer and nearer he drew, yet afraid of exciting observation. He knew his own purpose, and felt as if the busy masons would know it too, and drive him away before his object was attained.

He watched the mason chip and dress the stones to shape until the one fitted its fellows, and they were laid

side by side in a bed of mortar within the trench, and fresh mortar spread on these with a trowel to receive a second layer of stones for the foundation.

Then he went back to his own dry-wall building. But never had wall taken him so long before, for day by day he watched the masons at their work, and day by day learned something fresh—even the uses of square and plummet—until a well-built farrier's shed adjoined the blacksmith's forge, with smoothly-rounded pillars bearing up the roof.

He had learned the secret of the masons' tools, primarily the hammer, with which the stones were chipped and dressed. Unlike his own, it was steeled at *both* ends, one end shaped like an axe.

From a smith in Caerphilly he obtained just such another before the week was out.

Brief apprenticeship! No premium paid! No years of servitude to a master! God had gifted him with peculiar faculties. He had a special bias; he had also intelligence, perseverance, and determination to succeed. He had achieved so far a measure of success.

He began to speculate on success he could not measure.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE GRIP OF A STRONG HAND.

FIVE years had come and gone since that sad October when Evan Evans rode away from Brookside Farm buoyant with hope and expectation, yet from that hour no word or sign of his existence, no token of his death, had come to set feverish doubt at rest.

They had been five worrying and wearying years. For although William brought home his larger earnings to the common store, and his brothers did their best upon the farm, and there had been none but ordinary losses, the abstracted money had never been replaced. Mr. Pryse had prevented that with his extortionate raising of the rent. Then he had taken to visiting the farm at intervals, making free comments with sarcastic flings at Rhys, and cutting allusions to the still-missing Evans, and to the missing lease, which he insisted the man must have carried off, if it ever existed.

Ales had much to bear through it all. Every doubtful or stinging allusion to Evan cut her like a knife. But deep in her heart, as in a well of truth and faith, she cherished a belief that in God's good time he would come back to comfort her, and confound his traducers.

And so year after year she kept her place in spite of the black looks of Rhys and Cate.

Robert Jones would gladly have made another home for her. But Ales only shook her head, and said with a heavy sigh: 'What would I do if Evan came back? No, better remain for ever unmarried than for ever marred.' And finding her constancy unshaken, the man brought an orphan niece into his cottage to care for himself and his mother, a tacit confession that his suit was hopeless.

Some such proverbial answer Mrs. Edwards gave to Rhys about this time when he urged how much better it would be to have Cate always at hand as his wife, than to be paying for her frequent services, when William was away wall-building, as was often the case. 'Besides, mother, you cannot be expecting to keep Jonet always at home,' said he. 'Thomas Williams is beginning to talk to her, and it is clear he do be thinking of taking a wife, and he five years younger than myself, look you.'

'It will take a long while thinking, if he do be thinking of Jonet for a wife, and him not even got his workshop built,' replied the mother with decision. 'Your patience will hardly hold out till Jonet makes way for Cate. But, indeed, there do be no room here for a wife. And Cate must know it.'

'We might make room, if you were willing,' he persisted. 'We need only be clearing out the fleeces, pots, pans, and other lumber, and shut in the place at the back with a bit of wall and a door, and there will be a room as big as the dairy.'

'Indeed, and where would you be for putting what you call "lumber"?'

Rhys hesitated, pushed his fingers through his loose brown hair two or three times, as if to rake up an idea. What he called lumber were household goods and utensils in common request, fire-balls and turf included.

'Oh, sure, I can be talking to Willem about that;' and he strode away, with bent brows, leaving his mother to finish her whitewashing of the cottage front, and to digest his suggestion at leisure.

The Thomas Williams to whom Rhys had referred was the second son of the carpenter who had laughed in his sleeve at Mrs. Edwards' new notion of housing and scrubbing her swine, but who had ceased to laugh at improvements that had brought him in work all round. In fact, he had enclosed his workship and glazed his small windows, not to be behind his precocious son.

That son, Thomas Williams, was fully five years older than William Edwards, but the two had been drawn together from the fact that both indulged in original ideas, and smarted under a want of appreciation at home.

Thus it happened that when Rhys gave his mother a hint that Thomas Williams was making up to Jonet, his own brother was engaged in rearing a workshop for the young carpenter in close proximity to the premises of Robert Jones in the Aber Valley. At home he had been told he was too young to set up for himself, but he had served his seven years' apprenticeship to his father, had saved a little money, and was not so young as the self-

taught mason, who was making *his* first experiment in house-building for him.

On his father's hearth he was scoffed at for trusting so much as the raising of a workshop to the untried hands of a mere boy. So of his plans or his ulterior intentions he said little there, desirous to escape inevitable sneers and discouragement.

It was at Brookside Farm by the fireside after dark, the two young fellows had laid their heads together, and matured their plans, long before they were put into operation, and it was there the original idea of a workshop and living-room behind developed into something more.

It was there, night after night, whilst Rhys was down the hill at the weaver's, that Thomas Williams had unsuspected opportunities for seeing Jonet's fitness for wifehood. True, he had noticed her bright black eyes and hair, her clear complexion and pleasing smile, her neat attire and dapper figure, times out of mind on Sundays, and had thought how lithe and supple were her movements, how modest her demeanour. But it was on her mother's hearth, whether knitting, or spinning from her distaff, chatting all the while with one or other, and making much of her brothers, or when helping Ales to prepare supper, that he saw how ready she was to make herself useful and agreeable as well.

So it was that, out of the first design for a mere workshop, gradually a plan for the construction of a whole house shaped itself.

William Edwards was short and sturdy; his round

face had become square, his forehead broad, his jaw inclined to be massive; his keen grey eyes were deep set and thoughtful, his nose was large with broad nostrils, his dark brown hair crisp as a crown—at seventeen a premature man of thought and action, with strong, capable hands.

He was a thorough contrast to his friend, who was tall and slight, had a fair clear skin, with a tinge of healthy colour in his cheeks, and a crop of wavy auburn hair; in short, a handsome young fellow.

Handsome enough to attract Jonet, and more than Jonet; but not to lead Mrs. Edwards to countenance too much intimacy until assured that neither her son nor his friend had miscalculated his skill or its results.

Certainly William Edwards had not.

Passers-by, or people having business with the turf-cutter, lingered to watch the young mason at his work, as the walls gradually rose above the foundations, until firm, even, and compact as if laid by a master-hand, with a couple of rooms in the rear and an undivided attic over all, the whole stood fair to view. But even before Thomas Williams had laid the last rafter, or the thatched roof was on, or the casements were glazed, the owner might be seen at his bench plying plane or saw to make the whole substantial and complete.

The situation had been well selected. Proximity to Robert Jones' premises was as good as a modern advertisement to both young builders. Then it was on the main road to church, and was certain to arrest attention and inquiry.

Rhys stood before it the Sunday after completion, along with Cate and her father, feeling something like pride in his self-taught brother for the first time. He had taken a critical survey of all, back and front, when he heard Robert Jones calling out to him from his own low doorway—

'Look you there now! What do you think of that? Didn't I be telling you not to spoil a good builder to make a bad farmer?'

'Indeed you did, and I think you were right. But where he did be learning it all does be puzzling me.'

'Ah, well, you wait and see. The little one will be the big one in the end.'

The rest of the family had come up, Mrs. Edwards between William and Davy, Jonet having dropped behind with handsome Thomas Williams.

Congratulations came thick and fast, even from strange voices.

Rhys grasped his brother by the hand, and pressed it warmly.

'I did never be thinking you could do this, Willem, whatever. I do be pleased and proud to see it.'

''Deed, I did be knowing it long ago, and so did Robert Jones,' put in Owen Griffith.

'I wish I had known it. But where did you be learning to build like *this*?' asked Rhys, who held his dry walls of small account.

'Sure, and I did be studying at Caerphilly Castle, where you did be thinking me idling. Grand masonry does be there!' replied William.

Mrs. Edwards' eyes were swimming with tears. She saw a future before her son, and silently she thanked God.

'Will you like to be looking inside?' said the owner, who had unfastened the door and held it open whilst Mrs. Edwards and Jonet walked in.

The floor of the front shop was already thickly carpeted with curly shavings, and crowded with odd pieces of oak and pine shaped and trimmed ready to put together, a rush basket of tools was set upon the workman's bench under the window, pieces of timber were reared against the bare walls, and there was already an air of business about the place.

'It is all rough and bare at present,' said Thomas Williams apologetically. 'When the walls do be dry enough to whitewash, and these'—pointing to the incongruous pile upon the floor—'are made into stout seats and tables, and my tools do be set in order, as well as the house, you must be coming to look again, and rest on your way from church.'

'No one will be more welcome, whatever,' he added with emphasis, and a covert glance at Jonet, who had her feet on a flight of narrow stone steps leading up aloft. Presently she came down in surprise.

'Why, mother, look you; there is a big room overhead. What do that be for?'

Thomas flushed.

''Deed, William said it was best make the house complete at first, and show what we could do. Until it be wanted it will serve to keep my best timber dry and safe.'

'But you do not be noticing how solid and substantial are the walls.' This to Mrs. Edwards.

'Yes, yes, sure I do! And I pray God to prosper the work of both your hands.'

'Amen!' came with fervour from both young fellows, and had a loud echo from the peat-cutter in the rear.

There were not lacking turned-up noses or sneering comments on the presumption of two untried beginners setting out so pretentiously; but to them the substantial building with its two floors was as a modern manufacturer's pattern-card, and brought commissions to one or both.

And it frequently happened that the two were engaged to work together, certainly whenever Robert Jones had a chance to put in a word.

Long before Thomas Williams had his house set in order, or its wooden fittings complete, the vicar paid him a visit of inspection, and with him a gentleman he addressed as Mr. Morris. And a very close inspection the latter made, sounding and measuring the walls and trying the cement.

'Good workmanship—extremely good workmanship,' said he; 'but I expected no other from the boy. I shall recommend him.'

His opinion or his recommendation must have been worth something, for, very shortly, William Edwards was called upon to erect another two-floored house of even larger dimensions, nearer to Caerphilly and to the farrier's shed where he had graduated in masonry.

Previously to that, as they walked home, arm in arm together, after that Sunday view of the new workshop,

Rhys had laid before him the latest impediment their mother had thrown in the way of his marriage. It was something new for him to take counsel with William.

'Ah, well, Rhys,' assented he, 'mother do be something unreasonable. She do be worse than Laban, for you have been after Cate longer than Jacob's whole service, and you have been a dutiful son to wait so long. I will soon be making a room for you somewhere—sure I will.'

Leaving Rhys at the foot of the hill, he turned back to help his mother up the steep ascent, she having walked to church.

Finding her in the best of good humours, he advocated his brother's cause so successfully that, by the time they were at the top, he had her consent to build an additional room at the chimney-end of the house, agreeing that, if the room were ready, the marriage might take place at Hollantide, or earlier, if all the crops were harvested and housed.

'Ready, and May still blossoming?' William laughed as he collected his materials, and cleared sufficient ground, it seemed such a small affair. But before he had his wall two feet high came the unexpected commission for a two-storeyed house, also required in a given time, and put a stop to his brotherly arrangement.

It was a proud moment for the young builder, though Rhys looked blank, and all was not clear before himself.

'Never mind, Rhys,' said he; 'your place shall be ready in time. I wish I was as sure of the money to carry on the other work. I mean to manage it, but I

do not like to be asking mother for my money back again. Jones has offered to find the stone, and wait for payment, and Williams the woodwork; but there will be labourers' wages, and other things. I must think it out.'

He had not occasion to waste much time on 'thinks.' Mother and brothers agreed that the bulk of his contributions to the general purse should be regarded as a reserve fund for his use, nothing doubting it would be mutually advantageous.

So his new undertaking was planned out, begun, and carried to a successful issue, to the joint profit of himself and friends, and the satisfaction of his employer. Not, however, without one or two hitches, and a considerable expenditure of thought, for he was at once architect and builder; and surely never one so young and self-taught before. But I am telling fact and not fable.

In those days, if people worked long hours, it was not at express speed. There was no 'scamping,' for durability was a desideratum.

It was therefore late in September before William could spare time to add another stone to the wall at Brookside, and even then he had to lend a hand in the harvest-field.

He had, however, passed his word to Rhys, and there was no fear that he would break it. His promise meant performance, by hook or by crook.

Besides, it was no great matter, and very soon Thomas Williams had the joists and other woodwork ready on

the ground, and was fitting in the framework of the doorway, for the young mason, mounted on a plank raised upon sods, was adjusting the crowning stones of the new gable with an aspect of self-content.

It was close upon the dinner-hour, and Cate, as impatient as Rhys, had hurried to the front of the house along with Jonet to note progress, and clapped her hands in glee to find the masonry so near completion.

At that juncture William cast his eyes downhill. A sharp 'Ugh!' indicative of annoyance burst from him. 'Here do be coming that wicked old Pryse,' he cried. 'What do he be wanting here?'

The uphill road wound round to the farmyard in the rear. A stile admitted to the enclosure in front and a narrow gap farther away. Here, at the stile, he alighted from his horse, throwing the reins over the side-post.

'Ah, sure,' said he, with the straight-lipped smile which he made so offensive, 'things must be prospering with you. It is well to have a builder in the family when the house is too small. Some one must be going to venture on a wife; or perhaps Mrs. Edwards has grown weary of her widowhood?'

How evil was the look in those half-closed eyes of his, as William answered from his platform—

'Rhys is going to be married, sir. Have you anything to say against that?'

'Oh, dear, no. Rhys, indeed! Let me congratulate him on the auspicious prospect, and on the prosperity it indicates. His lordship will be delighted, I am sure, to

hear of these additions to the farm and the family.' And as he spoke he rubbed one skinny hand over the other slowly—

> 'Washing his hands with invisible soap,
> In imperceptible water'—

with apparent satisfaction born of anything but good-will.

Rhys and Mrs. Edwards coming upon the scene, the same mock salutations were offered, the sneer being so palpable that Jonet involuntarily edged nearer to Thomas Williams, and Cate caught at the arm of Rhys as if for protection.

For once he declined their proffered hospitality, contenting himself with a horn of cider. A mountain farmer's vegetarian meal was little to his liking, and he knew that meat was reserved for Sundays and rare festivals. Then mounting his horse he went trotting over the farm, reckoning up the value of crops stacked or standing, and of the sheep and cows pastured on the mountain-side, as if the produce had been his own, not the farmer's.

His presence cast a temporary gloom over the family. He was regarded as a bird of ill-omen.

But the cloud speedily dispersed, and the building went merrily on. By the beginning of October the rafters were on, and William had begun to thatch it in, and was considering the desirability of re-thatching the whole house, when their plans had a sudden check before Martinmas.

William, mounted on a ladder, was taking a bundle of fresh straw from his young labourer, when a red-faced man, whom he seemed to remember unpleasantly, came boldly over the stile, took a folded paper from his greasy pocket, and demanded insolently to see 'Jane Edwards, the tenant at will.'

He was the truculent official messenger of Mr. Pryse, and the paper he thrust into the widow's trembling hand was a formal 'notice of ejectment' from the farm!

The skinny hand of Mr. Pryse had closed upon the family with a vice-like grip.

CHAPTER XIX.

WITH GRANDFATHER'S GOLD.

HAD the paper handed to Mrs. Edwards contained a burning fuse to set the whole homestead ablaze and lay it in ashes, it could scarcely have created greater consternation.

The grin on the bearer's face and his mother's shriek of dismay brought William down from his ladder in haste, and sent the lad John Llwyd off at racing speed to carry the alarm of unknown calamity to the rest.

One by one came Rhys, Davy, and Jonet rushing into the house, to find their mother, with her apron thrown over her head, rocking herself to and fro on the old grandfather's armchair, wringing her hands and moaning in the extremity of distress, that to them seemed inexplicable.

'Oh that I should be living to see this day! Oh that things should ever be coming to this pass! Sure to goodness it will be the death of me!'

William, by her side, was endeavouring to master the legal jargon of a document in his hands; while Ales, with arms and apron wet from the washtub, was

bending over her mistress, and doing her rough best to check the outburst of grief after her own pithy fashion.

'Name o' goodness, Jane Edwards, you do be taking on as if Mr. Pryse was God Almighty! Sure the battle's not lost before it do be fought. 'Deed, you couldn't fret worse if Rhys had been carried off like my Evan. Look to God, mistress; His breath can shrivel up Mr. Pryse like a leaf in an east wind.'

But the shock was too new for immediate consolation. Philosophy is no plaister for a raw wound.

Meanwhile William had tossed the 'notice' across the table to Rhys, with the remark, on which he set his strong, white teeth, 'The skinny old kite has whetted his beak, and do be thinking to tear us with his talons; but, if I don't be cutting his claws for him before the year runs out, my name's not William Edwards.'

'The best way to do that would be to find the lease,' put in Davy. 'I wonder where grandfather did be hiding it?'

'I'll find it out, if I pull the old house down, stone by stone, cried William passionately; adding in another tone, 'Look you here, mother, crying will not be mending a broken egg. Let us show the old wretch a bold front, and who knows but God may help us to find the lease and keep the farm in spite of him. But, if not, in twelve months' time *I* may be making a home for you, farm or no farm.'

Rhys alone had not spoken. Jonet had crept up to her mother, and, kneeling by her side, whispered

comforting words, whilst tears ran down her own cheeks.

Rhys dashed the paper down on the floor and strode out, a suppressed cry of bitter anguish bursting from him. He could not ask Cate to marry now, with ruin hanging over them! He almost reeled against the doorway of the newly-erected addition, and groaned aloud. He felt as if the blow was directed against him —him above all.

'I did be so happy,' he murmured, 'and now— Oh, Cate, dear Cate, how can I be breaking the terrible news to you!'

Davy had followed Rhys.

''Deed, I will be for telling Cate, if it will be saving you pain,' he suggested quietly. 'Perhaps she may be taking it best from me.'

'Sure, Davy, you was always a good fellow,' was all the assent of Rhys. But without turning round he stretched out his broad brown hand to meet the warm clasp of Davy, who, in another minute, was on his way steadily downhill.

Probably both brothers anticipated hot-tempered tantrums from Cate Griffiths at the sudden change of her matrimonial prospects. But for once it was the mother, and not the girl, who flew into a rage at what she regarded as the final defeat of long-laid schemes.

For a moment Cate seemed dazed. 'Poor Rhys!' was all she said; 'he will need some one to comfort him, and your mother too.'

Ten minutes later Rhys, leaning stupidly against the

door-frame where Davy had left him, felt a pair of warm arms steal round his neck, and a loving voice say, 'Poor Rhys! What do it matter? There do be other farms to be had. We shall not lose each other if we do be waiting. You have got a lease *somewhere* that shall upset old Pryse. And look you, Rhys, neither Pryse nor his lordship have leases of their lives. He may not live to turn you out. Do not be disheartened. Trust God, do your duty, and leave the rest to Him!'

Poor Rhys! The very first words of sympathy had sunk into his soul. He had never known Cate so loving in all his life. She had been wayward, teasing, and tantalising, but never thus. His trial sank to nothing in the new discovery. He clasped her close, and took courage. Half his fear had been to lose her.

A loud summons from Ales recalled Rhys to neglected duties, and barefooted Cate sped homewards to have a sharp-tongued contest with her mother, who renewed an old cry that 'Cate needn't be spoiling her market for Rhys Edwards, whatever.'

The news spread rapidly that Mrs. Edwards had notice to quit the farm next Michaelmas, and commiseration was general.

But when Jane Edwards, supported by Rhys and Owen Griffith, walked into Mr. Pryse's apartment at the inn on the 9th of October, Caerphilly Fair Day, neither she nor Rhys made any allusion to the notice received or looked in any way daunted.

She put down her money, and asked for her receipt.

The agent eyed her curiously, but in the face of two witnesses he required to guard his words.

As Mrs. Edwards examined carefully the receipt he gave, he remarked, with his sinister smile—

'His lordship requires you to pay due regard to the ejectment notice served upon you. He cannot permit *tenants at will* to build on his land without express permission.'

'*If* his lordship do be knowing anything of that ejectment notice, he will know that it be just so much waste paper. Good-day, sir.'

He opened his eyes wide for once, and stared at her, but without another word Mrs. Edwards left the room, followed by Rhys and Griffith, who had previously paid his rent.

'You touched him there,' said they both in a breath, when clear of the inn.

They would have been sure of it had they seen him start from his seat and grasp the arms of his chair, exclaiming, as he sank back again—

'Confound the woman! What did she mean? Is the lease found? And what meant her innuendo anent his lordship's knowledge. They cannot have—but—no, no!' And there he sat biting his long nails in perplexity, oblivious of frequent knocks at the door, or tenants waiting in the passage for their turn.

No, the lease had not been found, but something else had, from which Mrs. Edwards derived her courage.

In the first outpouring of her indignation she had

forbidden William to proceed with his thatching. But he was equally persistent.

'What, mother!' he cried hotly, 'leave that bit of a place unroofed to be telling old Pryse that we be frightened by his dirty paper? Not I. And it's my belief his lordship does not know one word about it, whatever.'

The words dropped from his lips like an inspiration. His mother caught at them.

William, taking the bit between his teeth, was up his ladder, with John Llwyd in attendance, before she had fully mastered the probabilities of the case.

It was not a long business, for considering the state of affairs he was not so foolhardy as to re-roof the whole farm. But to make a neat job of it he had to clear away the worn and jagged edges of the old thatch to make an even joining.

As he did so, and created a gap, something fell down inside the kitchen with a thud and a rattle.

'Name o' goodness, what's that?' cried Ales from the fireplace, almost losing her hold of the iron pot she was hanging on the hook. 'Do you be going to bring the house about our ears?'

Another moment she sent up a scream, 'It's found! It's found! Thank God!'

But before she could lay hands upon the prize William was in the house, and had picked up a small oak box covered with dust and mould.

The scream of Ales brought Mrs. Edwards in from the farmyard with an apron full of eggs that fell with a smash to the floor.

What mattered the eggs? The sight of that curious old box drove eggs out of mind!

'Oh, goodness, Willem! That was your grandfather's box! Many a hunt your poor dear father did have for that box. Open it, quick!'

'It's locked, mother. I cannot force the hasp, it do fit so tight.'

'Ah, yes, I do forget. I do have kept the key all these years. Here, here, do make haste!'

How her fingers trembled as she brought from her deep pocket the big key of the coffer, and the tiny one so well preserved for—this.

A folded paper, and a multitude of coins!

John Llwyd peeping in at the door, roughly driven off by Ales, like another winged-footed Mercury, flew over field and fallow, echoing her cry, 'It's found! It's found!'

Before the paper could be read, or the coins counted, there were other echoes besides William's to the mother's pious 'Thanks be to God!'

The paper was a *will*, duly signed and witnessed, by which William David Edwards bequeathed to his son William, and to his eldest son Rhys after him, the lease of the farm, and all property in the land held under that lease, with whatever stock and crops might be thereon at his decease. And further left whatever moneys might be found along with that will for the use of that son, William, should necessity arise, but laid a charge upon him not to diminish but to add to the store, to be divided between David and any future children

born to the said William and Jane Edwards, in order to help them also to make a start in life.

What a shout went up when the '*lease*' was named! It became no longer a disputed fact. Here was legal proof that might serve them in good stead if the lease itself could not be found. No doubt the careful grandfather—who had died suddenly in a fit—had secreted that as well as the will just come to light. That might turn up any day.

Hope was in the ascendant. And now for the coins. Some—the five-pound and two-pound pieces of William and Mary—were unknown to the young men, though coined during the manhood of the hoarder; but the remainder, guineas and half-guineas from the mints alike of William and Queen Anne, had not yet dropped out of circulation, if seldom seen. Except four tarnished crown pieces, there was no silver.

It was a golden inheritance to feast their eyes upon. In all one hundred and forty-five pounds. Such a store had never met their sight before.

Yet, with the new possession came the dread of robbers. Ales counselled silence.

'''Deed, and it's best the teeth guard the tongue. It be a fool's trick to show the old fox the hen's nest. Him as could steal my Evan might lay his claws on your gold.'

It was good advice, and wisely followed.

John Llwyd had seen a paper unfolded, but no gold; so what he had to tell did not count for much to hearers unconcerned.

But, coupled with the demeanour of Mrs. Edwards and her son, it put Mr. Pryse on the tenter-hooks of uncertainty.

The thatching was completed, but no other little secret hiding-place was found, and discovery ended there.

It was the season for the general repair of fences and dry walls, and William was kept busy.

Winter was wearing away when, through his friend Thomas Williams, another stroke of good fortune came to him.

Though I have called the latter a carpenter, the word must be taken in its broadest significance; he was also a joiner, and he aspired to be a millwright. In the days when he served his long apprenticeship, a man was expected to master his craft in all its details and branches, and to bring his mind to bear upon it, if he had one. He was older than his friend, and the very nature of his occupation had enlarged the circle under his observation.

Unknown to any but William Edwards, his attic was stored with models of millwheels and machinery in various stages, at which he wrought when his workshop was closed.

One morning, whilst February's snow yet lay upon the ground, a substantial miller named Owen Wynn, whose old mill threatened to topple over into the stream, stopped his horse at the carpenter's door, and asked abruptly 'if that was one of the buildings a young man named Edwards had put up.'

Being answered in the affirmative, he asked permission to look over the place, adding—

'Sure, I have heard he is the best mason that ever put stone together in these parts, and I would like to be seeing for myself, whatever.'

Nothing loth, Thomas led the stranger over the whole premises (small, as *we* should think), indicating the peculiar points of the builder's excellence.

'Yes, yes,' said he, 'I observe,' and straightway marched up the attic stairs uninvited.

The models arrested his attention. 'Hah, sure! you are a millwright, are you? Are those improvements?'

Thomas Williams modestly 'thought they were.'

'Then you and this Edwards could build a substantial mill between you?'

'Without a doubt, whatever.'

'Is the mason at hand?'

''Deed, my apprentice do be gone for him.' The prescient young fellow had already scented business.

Sturdy and self-reliant as William might be, and older than his years, yet there could be no mistaking eighteen for thirty.

The miller started when he approached, his apron on, his hammer in his hand. He thought him extremely young to have obtained such repute.

However, before they separated, the two had been commissioned to build his water-mill and house, and a time appointed to find a suitable spot.

They were both conscious that it *was an undertaking* —with William a great one. They felt as if the making

or marring of their lives was in their hands. But they were not daunted.

'If difficulties arise we must surmount them,' said William resolutely, before his plans were drawn. 'As I cannot get books I can read, I must be studying the castle again.'

There were no Welsh books of any technical value to him; English he was unable to read. Fortunately for him, the walls and towers and arches of Caerphilly Castle had been as the leaves of an open and intelligible book, a work on ancient masonry no printed volume could surpass.

He had need to study it well now, to learn the secret of the arch, and how to construct a tunnel to bear away the watery overflow from the mill-wheel.

Learn it the young mason did, and that effectually.

Hard at work were they and their men all through the summer months, the builders with stone and wood, and ere the frosts of autumn came to lay a destructive finger on the mortar, there was a goodly mill by the side of the river, storey rising above storey, and the tunnelled waterway firm and compact, only some woodwork and the flagstone roof to be added.

It had been a period of great anxiety to both young men, for besides the risks attending all experimental work, Edwards was uneasy respecting his mother's possession of the farm, and Thomas Williams had resolved to seek Jonet for a wife if their work was a success.

Of any portion he might expect with her he knew nothing.

HE FOUND MR. MORRIS SEATED AT THE TABLE AS WELL AS THE VICAR.—*See page* 245.

The corn had ripened for the sickle, but no lease had yet been found. September shone upon the land, and the case became urgent.

One evening, when the masons had laid by their tools for the night, the good vicar had a visitor. William Edwards desired to see the Rev. John Smith most particularly.

To his surprise, when he was ushered into the low-ceiled parlour, he found Mr. Morris seated at the table as well as the vicar, evidently examining a number of geological specimens by the light of a couple of candles.

William had met Mr. Morris several times of late chipping at rocks with a hammer, but did not expect to meet with him there, and could have dispensed with his presence.

'Well, Edwards, what is your business?' asked the vicar after the first salutations. 'You need not hesitate to speak out; Mr. Morris is as much your friend as I am. What is it? Anything concerning the fine mill you are erecting?'

'No, sir, it do be concerning the farm—and Mr. Pryse.'

The gentlemen exchanged glances across the table. The change in William's frank voice and manner had not been lost on them.

William laid his grandfather's will open before the vicar.

'We did be finding that last autumn hid in a small box under the thatch, sir.'

'You did not find the missing lease along with it, did you?'

'No, sir. And we cannot be finding it, high or low. But you will see, sir, the lease be named here more than once.' And drawing closer to the vicar he pointed with his finger.

'Yes, I perceive. Well, that certainly establishes the fact that you *had* a lease.'

'Sure, indeed, sir. But do you be thinking it would serve instead of the real lease to stop Mr. Pryse from turning us out of the farm?' questioned William, with a very anxious face.

'Um—a—um—a—well, I am not so sure about that. We might get an opinion if there was a lawyer about, not under Pryse's finger and thumb. You must know, Morris,' said the vicar, turning to his friend, 'this young fellow's father gave mortal offence to Pryse by a blunt opinion that he was overreaching. He has owed the family a grudge ever since, and has done all in his power to oust the widow from her holding. You will remember the talk there was, six years ago, about the disappearance of a young man from Cardiff, who was supposed to have gone off in the mysterious *Osprey* with money, not his own—some people said was "*carried* off" perforce. Anyway, that was the farm-servant of Mrs. Edwards, who was about to be married—for I read out the banns—and he had with him both his own savings and the money to pay the widow's half-year's rent. He was seen to enter Mr. Pryse's office. He ordered and bought things to set up farming, and *paid* for some. In three weeks' time Mr. Pryse made a seizure on the farm for unpaid rent, declaring the man a defaulter. Fortun-

ately, Mrs. Edwards had the means to meet his demands. Since then he has twice raised the rent, insisting that the widow is only a tenant at will, and last Martinmas served her with a notice of ejectment to come in force this present month, insisting that no lease exists. It so happens that both the father and grandfather died too suddenly to make any disclosures or arrangements. Thus the lease is missing, and this will has only just come to light. Look it over, and say what you think.'

'Take a seat, William. I did not observe that you were standing all this while,' he added.

Mr. Morris shook his head as he folded up and returned the document. 'To any unprejudiced person this settles all doubt that a lease exists, and the duplicate must be in the possession of his lordship or his agent. But it does not specify the terms or the date of the lease, and *there* Mr. Pryse has the advantage. He may know of some clause you have infringed.'

William sighed heavily. 'Then there will be no hope for us. It will break poor mother's heart, in truth it will. We don't believe his lordship knows a word. If I could but get to see him. But there, Mr. Pryse would stop that!' and he rose to depart.

'Stay, stay!' cried Mr. Morris; 'maybe I can help you at this pinch. Find me pen, ink, and paper, Mr. Smith.'

William looked on in bewilderment whilst the quill of Mr. Morris went squeaking across the paper, or he nibbled the feather end of the pen in a pause for thought, or for an answer to a question.

After a time, which to William appeared hours, he threw the paper across the table to the vicar.

'There,' said he, 'is a brief statement of the case, as detailed to me. If you find it correct, pray both of you affix your signatures. It shall be my care *that* reaches his lordship's own hand, though he is now at Court, and time is short. If you leave the will in our good vicar's charge, I will make a fair copy and enclose it, along with some private intelligence of my own concerning Mr. Pryse. Good-night, young man. Tell your mother not to be downhearted.'

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

'NAME o' goodness, what be keeping Willem out so late?' said his mother, peering out into the night. 'I do hope he have not been stopping at the inn again, and him with that will in his pocket. He do be getting very unsteady since he has been having those big places to build.'

''Deed, his sudden rise do be turning his head. He may have as sudden a fall one of these days,' was the commentary of Rhys.

But when William came in half an hour later, as steady and sober as his brothers, and explained satisfactorily how he chanced to be so very late, there was nothing but the voice of gratitude to be heard. He had left the vicarage almost choked by his own inarticulate thanks.

'It was quite providential that Mr. Morris did be staying at the vicarage,' said Mrs. Edwards. 'He do be a great man, sure, and kind.'

'Yes, yes, and it was providential that *I* went to consult the vicar, instead of Rhys. Mr. Morris would be knowing nothing of *him*, whatever,' added William, rather proudly.

It was true that his uncommon success was making him somewhat self-sufficient. But so Rhys had been, with less reason.

The weeks crept slowly on one after another.

At the new mill, mason and millwright congratulated each other on hazardous difficulties overcome. The roof was on to the last flag. The arched tunnel was strong and firm. The machinery worked well, and the wheel went merrily round. When the painters cleared away their paint pots, they could hand the key to the miller in triumph.

At the farm, hope had given way to doubt, and doubt was sinking into despair. The prayer of faith was timid and wavering. Only another day remained before the dreaded 9th of October, and as yet nothing had been heard either from Mr. Morris or the vicar, or from his lordship. Impending evil took the gloss off William's satisfaction.

The morning of Tuesday the 8th broke dull, dreary, and depressing, with a heavy mist on the mountain and in the valley, which, towards eight o'clock, resolved itself into a drizzling rain, that made the cattle hang their heads and the sheep huddle together for mutual comfort.

In view of contingencies, the farm stock had been reduced by sale below ordinary limits, and well-disposed neighbours had offered temporary houseroom and shelter amongst them for both family and anything movable. Thomas Williams cleared out his large attic for their accommodation, and Robert Jones promised to keep his

team in readiness to remove household goods or newly-gathered crops at a moment's notice.

Nothing was being done on the farm but what common care for the living, biped and quadruped, rendered necessary. But a general ransack of house and barns was going on for the discovery of the missing lease, and everything was topsy-turvy. Never had the storeroom had such a turn-out for years. Red-eyed Jonet and Cate ripped open beds and pillows, turned over sacks, dived among fleeces. For the twentieth time Mrs. Edwards emptied the great oak chest, and turned over the leaves of the large old Bible, her face grey and set like a rock.

Ales alone bore a cheerful countenance, and baked the week's bread as in the ordinary course.

'Look you, Jane Edwards,' she said, 'it's no use fretting and fuming. What God wills we must bear. But there's no need to be putting the burden on one's own back before He bids one take it up.'

Mrs. Edwards sighed heavily. 'Ah, yes, Ales, true it is; but a good servant need never seek good service. We may seek far for a good farm.'

'You don't be turned off this yet. And it's my firm belief you will be keeping the farm in spite of old Pryse. God's finger is stronger than man's arm. You wait and be patient. I've not been dreaming of Evan night after night for nothing. He seems to say, "I'm coming, I'm coming;" and I feel as if God was bringing him back, look you. I do!'

'Ah, poor, foolish Ales! your longings do create your dreams. Evan be as far to seek as our lease.'

'May be so, and may be not. I do be feeling as if he was as near and as warm almost as the loaf just baked, look you. And I feel, I feel'—

'You do *look* half out of your mind, Ales,' said Mrs. Edwards, in grave rebuke, rising from her hopeless quest and locking the coffer again. 'This be no time to talk of foolish dreams.'

'Mother,' called Jonet from the bedroom they were searching, 'there be a strange man with a bundle on a stick coming over the stile, and he's dripping wet.'

Ales screamed, darted out by the open door, and before Mrs. Edwards could follow she was clasped in the arms of a rough-looking fellow, and crying out, 'I knew, I knew! Thank God!' In another moment she was sobbing and laughing hysterically on his breast in the reaction of her strange excitement.

'Name o' goodness, that never do be you, Evan?' burst from Mrs. Edwards in unmitigated amazement.

'Ay, ay, it's me for certain,' was answered cheerily, as the sturdy, unshaved man brushed past her, carrying his limp sweetheart into the kitchen and grandfather's stiff-backed chair, heedless of the wet trail he left upon the floor.

Picture the excitement. Strong-minded Ales in hysterics! Jonet and Cate rushing about wildly, and shouting out that long-lost Evan had come back! William and Rhys hurrying in, astonished and delighted, followed by Davy, for once in a hurry; and Evan, loth

LONG-LOST EVAN HAD COME BACK.—*See page 252.*

to release Ales, puzzled to find hands for them all to shake at once, and equally puzzled how to compose Ales, who is sobbing and laughing by turns.

Housewifely instinct, or a peculiar fume in her nostrils, acts as a restorative. 'The bread's burning,' she gasps, and Cate presses forward to the rescue of the scorching loaves, forgotten in the confusion and excitement.

Then follows a string of questions, huddled one upon another, but before any one can be answered, Mrs. Edwards says dolefully, 'Ah, Evan, we be thankful to see you back, but you have come on a sad day for all that.'

'Have I? Then, 'deed, it had nearly been a sadder, for in coming across the ford, I either mistook my depth, or the water is rising, for it came up to my waistband, and nearly carried me off my feet. But I'm not to be drowned, that's clear, till I've settled with that old rogue Pryse,' he says, with an emphasis and a look that are in themselves anathemas.

'Ah, I told you so,' cries Ales. 'Woe to the man that makes a hundred sad!' but in the midst of an affirmative chorus comes an interruption in the shape of the old brown house-dog, wagging his tail and dropping a big bundle wrapped in sailcloth at the feet of Evan, then jumping up to ask for recognition and thanks.

It is then seen that Evan is standing in a pool of water, whereupon Mrs. Edwards orders him off to change his wet clothes for the dry ones in his bundle, whilst she and the other women bestir themselves to set the dinner on the table, Ales making all sorts of blunders in the process.

It is by no means a common dinner on a Welsh farm table at that period, although it only comprises pork, potatoes, and greens, boiled in the same pot with the dough dumplings. Mrs. Edwards marks it out reverently as they take their seats.

'Let us be thanking Almighty God that the good food provided for our last dinner under this roof should have become, by His blessing, a thanksgiving feast; for the one supposed dead do be alive again, the one lost do be found.'

The general 'Amen' was peculiarly solemn, and it occurred to Evan that for a thanksgiving there was more of sorrow than gladness.

Then the first greeting of Mrs. Edwards recurred to him, coupled with the remark about a 'last dinner'; and though the savour was appetising, and his fast had been long, he could not have touched a morsel until his doubts were resolved. He put his question, and was speedily answered by more than one voice—

'Oh, Evan, we cannot find our lease, and Mr. Pryse be going to drive us off the farm to-morrow.'

It was his turn to look solemn. ''Deed, and that do be bad. You do have a lease, sure to goodness?'

'Oh yes. Willem found grandfather's will, and the lease do be left to Rhys; but no lease can we be finding anywhere.'

'Where have you been looking?'

All sorts of likely and unlikely places were named.

'My first master kept his lease in the Bible. Did you look there?'

'Indeed, yes, Evan,' came from Mrs. Edwards, with a disheartened sigh; 'I turned over every leaf.'

'Oh, I do mean under the old cloth cover. He kept his there.'

A moment of breathless astonishment—a general rise from the table!

Mrs. Edwards was down on her knees unlocking the coffer.

In another minute the Bible was out; the stout cloth cover ripped off. There lay the parchment, flat and clean, as when laid there years upon years before by hands now in the clasp of death.

'*Thank God!*' cried Mrs. Edwards, still upon her knees. 'My children, the finger of God is in this. Our search did be vain till He did send His own messenger to point it out. As Ales did say, God's finger *is* stronger than man's arm; strong to save. Let us once more thank Him.'

The relief had been overpowering. The thanksgiving was strong and deep. The reaction was too great almost for speech. The dinner, nearly cold, was eaten in silence; but it was the silence of hopefulness, not despair.

It was followed by a clattering and chattering of loosened tongues, guesses at Mr. Pryse's consternation on the morrow, and questionings of Evan's disappearance and adventures, which we may leave that morrow to answer.

. . . . . .

Mean though he was through every fibre of his being, Mr. Pryse was lavish in regard to his own creature

comforts. Yet even many of these he contrived to obtain gratuitously from tenants who loved him little and feared him much, or from obsequious sea-captains whose cargo was not altogether coal or iron, captains who had goods to bring ashore without compliments to Custom House officers. And those were anything but days of free trade.

He sat at ease between a cosy fire, which cost him nothing, and a round breakfast-table on which were the remains of chicken, ham, and eggs, all of which were equally cheap. A fragrant aroma of Mocha coffee yet lingered around the foreign china cup and saucer and coffee-pot, none of which had paid duty to England's monarch, any more than the Barcelona silk handkerchief cast lightly over the knee he was indolently nursing on the other, whilst he leaned back in his tall chair picking his teeth, and a smile of uttermost self-content and enjoyment creased the parchment-like skin into folds under his wicked old eyes.

'Yes,' said he, half aloud to himself; 'out they go to-morrow, stock and lot! And let them get another farm where they can. 'Lease, indeed'—and he chuckled. 'If they could find any lease to show, there would have been no sending of cows and sheep and grain to market. Ah, yes, I shall soon pay off my old score to that fellow who drowned himself like a fool. Yes, and get a higher rent, now that building son of his has enlarged the homestead.'

The chuckle had not died out of his skinny throat when the door opened, and he caught his breath, for a special messenger from his lordship, booted and spurred,

like one who rides in haste, entered unannounced, and with the simple remark that he 'had rather a rough passage across the Severn from Bristol that morning, and found the air raw and cold,' presented a sealed packet, marked 'Immediate and important.'

Had he said he crossed in a Revenue cutter, Mr. Pryse might not so readily have taken the hint thrown out.

As it was, he apologised for the coldness of the breakfast, and from a private cabinet produced a bottle of genuine Hollands—which had never gone through a Custom House—and, setting them before his unexpected visitor, invited him to help himself.

'I trust his lordship is well?' he said blandly, but quite as a matter of course.

'No; he was dangerously ill when I left,' came from the courier, with startling bluntness.

What? His easy-going master ill! perhaps dying! Mr. Pryse turned ashen grey. 'You don't say so!' he ejaculated with a gasp, his fingers trembling, as he at last unfolded the despatch and began to read, hardly conscious that the man, smacking his lips over the fiery Hollands, had been watching him all along with keen, observant eyes.

With all Mr. Pryse's self-command the paper rattled in his fingers as he read. It was not a lengthy epistle, and only the signature was his lordship's; the letter was from his son and heir. Its sole purport was to prevent injustice, as the act of a dying man.

In stern and peremptory words it forbade Simon Pryse to harass or disturb the Widow Edwards in her holding,

since he must know it was leased for three lives, and would not fall in until the demise of William Edwards' eldest son, then living. Moreover, he was commanded to refund, from his own purse, all excess rent he had extorted from the widow, *yet not included in his accounts.* And he was required to furnish a true and just statement of all the moneys in his hands, and all his dealings and transactions in his lordship's name, not omitting the share he was said to have taken in the abduction of one Evan Evans, seven years prior to that date.

'It shall be done,' said Mr. Pyrse hoarsely, as the messenger rose to depart, fully satisfied with the result of his observations.

'Yes, it *shall* be done!' cried the infuriated agent, when the man was gone, springing to his feet with a tremendous oath. 'But not as his lordship or his lordship's heir proposes. Shall I forego the revenge I have nursed for years, when a few hours will bring the hated tribe within my grip? No; I will set my feet upon their necks if I die for it!' and another fierce anathema parted those thin lips of his.

All on a sudden he stopped short, and bit his long nails viciously. 'Has some one turned traitor?' he murmured between set teeth. 'Those poor farming idiots could not get a letter to his lordship's hand. No matter. The bolt has fallen sooner than I expected, but trust me to be taken unprepared. It has fallen in the nick of time. In another hour the *Cambria* would have sailed.'

Upstairs, three steps at a time like a boy, he ran, exulting in his own crafty schemes for outwitting justice;

drew his blue and white check curtain quite across his bedroom window—a preconcerted signal to the *Cambria's* skipper—changed his kerseymere smalls for his leather riding breeches, and was downstairs in his private office as usual, yet not as usual. He was on his knees before his strong box and his golden god.

In his guilty knowledge and his craftiness, he had years before prepared for flight on emergency. He had lodged a portion of his filchings in Wood's Gloucester Bank, under a fictitious name. Yet as there was no other provincial bank at that time in all England and Wales, and no bank notes under £20 value, exchange was not easy. Rents, etc., were paid in specie. Specie also was transmitted to his lordship under strict guard. Whenever an opportunity occurred, the agent converted coin into notes, and packed them in the waistband of his leather breeches. Still, coin had accumulated in his strong box, always packed close, and secured with triple locks, ready for removal on short notice, though its weight belied its bulk.

The signal brought the skipper. There was already a tacit understanding between the worthy pair, and their conference was brief. Arrangements were made for the *Cambria* to drop down the river with the evening tide, and lay to outside in the bay. Fain would the skipper have Mr. Pryse go aboard with his strong box, and make all sail at once.

No, no; he was not willing to forego his revenge or the prospect of adding a succession of rents to his ill-gotten gains; so a four-oared boat was to meet him at

Taff's Well landing-place up the river on the morrow, and await his coming—ay, even until midnight.

His impish friends, Avarice and Malice, were more potent advisers than the wary skipper; so, with a shrug of the shoulders, he withdrew, and obeyed.

'That's a heavy load you've got, messmates,' called a sailor to the two others conveying to the schooner the strong box, covered with tarpaulin, as if to protect it from the rain. But they merely answered, 'Ay, ay,' and declined assistance.

The afternoon was then far spent, but two horses stood at the door, and in a few minutes Mr. Pryse, booted and spurred, and cased in a long riding-coat, was in the saddle, the flaps of his three-cornered hat let down, as was commonly the case in wet weather, so as to convert it into a broad-brimmed slouch, a pair of saddle-bags slung before him, likewise holsters, fitted with pistols, carefully loaded.

He trotted away from the door he was never to see again, with a lie on his lips to his housekeeper, and, followed by his less elaborately-accoutred attendant, took the new Merthyr Tydvil Road, which not only ran parallel with the river in a direct line wherever practicable, but avoided the long detour by Caerphilly, where no rents would be paid until the Martinmas Fair.

He had rents, and more than rents, to collect as he stopped at wayside houses, or so-called inns, off and on the direct road, and was not to be denied, though a day before due. So he managed to pocket some heavy cash before, at a late hour, he stopped for the night under the

shadow of cliff-seated Castel Coch, to dry his drenched overcoat, eat a hearty supper, and retire to *rest*, leaving orders that he was to be in the saddle by daybreak in the morning.

He was in a desperate hurry to transact his pleasant bit of business with Mrs. Edwards, but could not forbear grasping at all the coin he could by the way, never thinking that the overreaching hand is apt to grasp at shadows.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FINGER OF GOD.

THE heavy rain had ceased in the night. The sky was clear, the eaves and trees had forgotten to drip, the mist was lifting from the mountain-top and from the surcharged river, when, after a succession of profitable calls, between nine and ten o'clock in the morning, master and man rode up the rugged ascent to Brookside Farm, and, dismounting, the former walked into the house with insolent assumption, and, finding only Mrs. Edwards there, demanded rudely—

'Is the half-year's rent ready?' Of course, that was his first care.

'There do be no rent owing, sir.'

'What do you mean, woman?'

'I mean that you have been paid, and overpaid, and I do not be going to pay you one brass farthing.'

He grew livid, set his teeth, and looked as if he would have struck her to the ground.

'We'll see about that. You had due notice to quit. You have stayed on the farm in defiance of the law, and now, by'—(and he swore a great oath)—'you shall turn out without stick or stock. Morgan,' over

his shoulder to the man, 'call up the other men. We will soon see who is master here. I seize in his lordship's name.'

'And *I* forbid in his lordship's name,' said Mr. Morris, whose shadow in the doorway had been mistaken for the man Morgan's.

Mr. Pryse recoiled. Mr. Morris was no stranger to him; and no friend of his, he well knew. What brought him there, or the vicar, close at his heels?

'By what right do *you* presume to interfere?' he asked boldly.

'By *this*, sir, unfolding a letter. 'I presume you know his lordship's hand and seal. *You* were not the only one for whom the courier had a despatch yesterday.'

Mr. Pryse seemed to shrink within his clothes. A greenish hue overspread the yellow of his skin. A clammy dew burst out upon his forehead. Had he spurned the skipper's sage advice only to come here for this? It was maddening to think of.

He attempted to brazen it out, as a last resource.

'I am acting in his lordship's interest, sir. He has been shamelessly misinformed. These people have not paid more than a fair rental. And they never had a lease.'

'What do you be calling *that*, sir?' And Rhys, pressing to the front, held up the lease—at a safe distance, for Mr. Pryse appeared ready to spring upon it like a wild cat.

'And now, sir,' said Mr. Morris sternly, 'you will have to disgorge. Those are his lordship's orders. You

see we hold a quittance for half a year's rent. Evan, bring forward the receipt.'

Had a ghost risen from the grave to confront him, Mr. Pryse could not have looked more aghast or terror-stricken, when Evan stepped from behind into the light, with the faded receipt in his hand.

Baffled, defeated, confronted, as it were, by the dead.

Mr. Pryse shrieked aloud, fell on his knees, covering his eyes with his quivering hands.

'You here?—*you?* I fancied you had gone down with the *Osprey*.'

'You hear him, gentlemen? You hear him? He do be owning his share in kidnapping me! No, you smuggling old rogue, when the *Osprey* went all to pieces on the rocks at the Land's End with its drunken crew and cargo—I, yes indeed *I*, gentlemen, who had been dragged on board bound like a thief—I did be the only one saved. I had been sent up aloft to punish me because I would not join the wicked crew, and when the mast did go overboard, I held on for my very life. I did be picked up the next day by an outward-bound East Indiaman, when there was little life left in me. But I wasn't to be drowned till I'd settled scores with this old villain here, that did send me adrift with rogues like himself, and to rob the widow blackened my honest name.

'No, Mr. Pryse, though I've been sailing the seas all these sorrowful years in one craft or other, cuffed, kicked, half-starved, used worse than a dog, and never

able to make my way back to my sweetheart or home, if it had not been for another shipwreck I'd never have been here now. A Liverpool trader took me and two shipmates off a raft in the middle of the ocean, when we was half-mad with hunger and thirst, and the good captain, God bless him, sent me on shore at Fishguard, to make my way home to my sweetheart as quick as I could. And I didn't have to beg my way, for I had got money hid under my belt. And I do be thanking God, sirs, for bringing me here in time to confound this wicked old shivering coward. I do be feeling as if I could shake every bone out of his ugly skin, but Ales bids me leave him to God and his master.'

'Deed, he deserves kicking from the top of the hill to the bottom,' thrust in fiery William.

Not a word had the detected steward spoken, but his features and his lean fingers worked vindictively, as if longing to grasp the speakers' throats.

All at once he shrieked out—

'That receipt's a forgery, a vile forgery. Look at it, gentlemen. That paper has never been in salt water. Ugh! How could a common sailor keep a bit of paper unworn and dry for six years, and through two shipwrecks? It is absurd.'

Gaining courage from his own sneering suggestion, Mr. Pryse rose to his feet, little expecting the answer which came from William.

'Deed, no, sirs. Neither our receipt, nor Owen Griffith's here, nor Evan's own money ever went nearer the sea than old Breint's saddle. He had made a private

pocket under the lining, and there they did be waiting for him, yes, sure.'

'It's well they did, for those thieves on the *Osprey* did be stripping me of all I had,' put in Evan.

And now, Mr. Morris declaring the receipts genuine, insisted on Mr. Pryse there and then refunding the extra rent extorted year by year from Mrs. Edwards, giving a quittance up to date on account of the receipt.

But Mr. Pryse had recovered courage—and craft. He began to bluster. Refused to acknowledge the authority of either Mr. Morris or the vicar. He was answerable to his lordship. To him only would he render an account. He would bid them good-morning.

'Well, sir,' said Mr. Morris, 'I cannot enforce his lordship's commands without legal warrant. But had I known all I have heard since I came hither, I should have come provided with a warrant for your arrest, Mr. Pryse. And I warn you the reckoning will come sooner than you expect.'

Much sooner!

He walked out of the farmhouse with head erect and defiant, as if he had won a victory. He bade Morgan pay his myrmidons and follow; then rode down hill, baffled, but not wholly defeated. He had not disgorged a penny, had added other rents as he came along to the hoard he was carrying away. Warrant, indeed! He would soon be beyond reach of warrants!

'Nay,' he shouted back with a snarl, 'threatened men live long;' but before he reached the level, some sense of ungratified revenge must have stung him, for he put

BLINDED BY PASSION, HE SPURRED HIS HORSE TO THE UNCERTAIN FORD.—*See page* 271.

spurs to his horse, and dashed on, splashing through the swollen brook, and turning the corner to the ford—not the high-road—as if pursued by a troop of demons.

Blinded by his own evil passions, exulting in his escape, yet alarmed by the sound of hoofs behind him, he spurred his horse to the uncertain ford in the same hot haste, seeing nothing but his own need to cross.

His follower heard a shriek, but reached the river's brink only in time to see a swirling mass of something far down the rain-filled river.

Mr. Pryse had gone to meet the *Cambria's* boat in other fashion than he contemplated.

His spurs entangled in the stirrups, his pockets and saddle-bags weighted with ill-gotten coin, horse and man had gone together.

A Welshman in a coracle[1] called out to the ferryman at Taff's Well Ferry, and he to the *Cambria's* men rowing up-stream, and amongst them they got a panting, struggling, half-dead horse ashore, to find what *had* been Mr. Pryse *underneath*, clutching at the turned saddle and bags with the grip that never relaxes—the grip of death.

Cover him over. Let the Preventive-service men, chasing the other boat, fight with pistol and cutlass for the possession of the dead, his gold, and his incriminating papers, whilst the smart Preventive cutter in the bay boards the short-handed *Cambria*, and tows her con-

[1] An oval wicker boat covered with hide, with only a single seat, as used by the ancient Britons, and by the Welsh far into the present century.

fiscated prize into port, the dead man's strong box included. Little recks the drowned man what becomes of his hoard. He has gone to his final reckoning with a Lord he had forgotten, a Lord no man can cheat or deceive.

Intelligence of his retributive death comes to the rejoicing family at the farm with a sobering shock, but nobody affects to lament. And all over his lordship's wide domain, oppressed men breathe freer for this one man's death.

'Man deliberates, but God delivers,' is said with bated breath by more than sententious Ales, whilst Mrs. Edwards insists that his death is a judgment for his strictures on her lost husband.

And whilst the unhonoured remains of the fraudulent agent are committed to the earth, in Cardiff, with no mourner but his housekeeper, the vicar of Eglwysilan reads out the banns once more for Evan and Ales, and for Rhys Edwards and Cate Griffiths also.

Great is the bustle of preparation. There is money in possession and hope in the future.

There is no need to ask for contributions at the 'bidding,' though the invited guests are many.

The new room William built is being fitted up with somewhat more regard to health and decency than has been common hitherto. Cate is bringing to her bridegroom more than had been looked for—dowlas sheets and blankets, spun and woven under their own cottage roof, and a good flock bed and pillows from the same source. Then she had not been idle, and if under-*linen*

was not worn in those days in that humid climate, she had a fair supply of flannel, and of linsey-woolsey for gowns and aprons, all of her own spinning. Ay, and she had stockings knitted ready to assume with her new dignity.

The cottage at Castella has long been occupied by other tenants. Mr. Morris offers Evan a small farm between Caerphilly and Cardiff, on very easy terms. The goods he had bought and paid for have been sold, but fresh are furnished readily; and Robert Jones generously conveys the long-hoarded household goods of Ales to her new home, without fee or guerdon, and, with them, a winter store of peat and culm as a wedding gift.

Both at Owen's cottage and the farm the women are busy as bees, baking and boiling for the wedding feast, for which Thomas Williams sets up long plank tables in the meadow that slopes to the foot of the hill, the break-neck ascent to the farm being a consideration on such an occasion.

For the brides are supposed unwilling to be wed, or their friends to part with them, and there is racing and chasing to recover the runaway brides, and mock contests to obtain possession of them, in which the mountain ponies play their parts well. Then, the brides being captured, there is the headlong race to the church, which bodes ill to any unwary pedestrian they may meet. It is a remnant of old barbaric custom not to be dispensed with, and all the youths and maidens, far and wide, join in the race. Scarcely less noisy is the return, when the

ceremony is over, and each bride is mounted behind her husband, Rhys and Cate taking the precedence.

Be sure they bring appetites to the feast, where huge joints of boiled beef are matched by piles of smoking potatoes and turnips, the brown-jacketed esculents being as yet dainties to the multitude. Then there are great pitchers of *cwrw da* and buttermilk for thirsty throats. And if there be a deficiency of glass and cutlery, according to our notions, all is as it should be to the feasters, who are to the manner born, and not fastidious, and who fling their contributions to the feast into the earthen bowls with right goodwill.

Something much more important gave grace to the festive occasion, and that was the presence of a Welsh harper, one of the decaying race of bards, who sang them songs of Arthur and Llewellyn, and twanged his harp for lively dances on the greensward when the boards were cleared, and might be held accountable for more than one match decided that day. Certainly Thomas Williams obtained Jonet's shy promise to marry him in the spring if her mother would consent; and even Davy struck up an acquaintance with the niece of Robert Jones, that was likely to lead to something more in the end.

It was quite an exceptional gathering, for not a drop of rain fell the whole day to mar the entertainment, and, short though it was, a good round frosty moon offered its shining lamp to light the middle-aged couple and their escort to their new home beyond Caerphilly, and to make even the crossing of the Taff safe to the contingent from

the mountains beyond. All had 'gone merry as a marriage bell.'

And here my story might be supposed to end; but for my hero—and I count William Edwards a hero—a new era was about to dawn.

I have indicated that mines of coal and iron were being worked in Glamorganshire, but that the want of roads and bridges for conveyance and communication retarded the development of its untold mineral resources. Then, the hard nature of the coal already dug unfitted it, except as culm, for household use or smelting purposes in such furnaces as existed, where the fuel was principally charcoal.

But about this time experiments were being made to test its utility, and Mr. John Morris, who for years had gone geologising among the mountains, was one of the first to suggest its feasibility. He had made experiments on a small scale, but Mr. Pryse had thrown impediments in the way of smelting on a larger basis in the neighbourhood of Cardiff, where the river and the sea were close for conveyance if his scheme succeeded.

'It was too near the Castle. His lordship would have no reeking furnaces so close to his residence. There was no land for sale,' etc. etc.

Mr. Morris was not to be put down by Mr. Pryse. He had applied, not to the old Viscount, but to his son and heir, who was not hoodwinked by Mr. Pryse, and cordially seconded the proposal. The old Viscount was even then on his deathbed. The succession of the new

one, shortly after Mr. Pryse was committed to his narrow cell, left Mr. Morris free to act.

The day before the double wedding he explained his views to William Edwards, and made to him a proposition.

So it happened that, whilst Rhys and the rest were making merry, William was half the time lost in thought, and one or other rallied him on his unsociability, as they considered it.

He was simply considering his ability to undertake the erection of the smelting furnaces John Morris had in view. He had not much doubt of his own power to accomplish anything any other man could do, or had done, if the opportunity to study what had been previously done was afforded him. But here something was required differing from aught that had gone before, or with which he was acquainted.

Mr. Morris had given him time for mature deliberation. He had great faith in the capacity of the self-taught genius, and still more in his indomitable determination to overcome difficulties.

Yet books he had none that would afford the information he needed. He had done what he could to supply the defects of his education, thanks to the vicar. But he was still 'Cymro uniaith,' a Welshman of one language; and, though the literature of Wales certainly dates back to the twelfth century, and is said to date back to the sixth, its ancient legends, ballads, and poems would not instruct him how to build furnaces which should convert the hard Welsh coal into the smelter's slave.

If there were English books on the subject, he was ignorant, and could not have read them had such been laid before him.

He was not given to waste his time in unprofitable regrets.

Before any one else was astir he was on the road northward to Merthyr Tydvil, bent on examining the process of iron-smelting as there carried on. The name of John Morris procured him ready admission to the works. But, although they had been in existence for a couple of centuries, and the ancient forests had been denuded of their giant oaks to supply their furnaces, they had as yet no furnace that would fuse the ore with coal alone, and the oak trees were growing scarce.

William came away shaking his head, and muttering as he strode along: 'Sure, if those be their smelting furnaces, there do be one as good at the Castle. They do be wanting a stronger blast if they employ coal. It will be a job to construct furnaces that will burn the stone-coal Mr. Morris be saying gives such great heat with neither flame nor smoke. But I'm bound to have a try what I can be doing. Sure, I'm not willing to give in without a try, look you!'

And in this frame of mind he returned home to make calculations and sketches, and to think out the matter, walking to and fro in front of the house, with his head bent down and his hands behind him.

'Idling,' his mother called it. Rhys had grown wiser.

'Deed, mother, Willem do be having his "thinks." Best be leaving him alone.'

'But he do not even be knitting, look you!'

'Never mind, mother *fuch*; he do be "studdying," as he do call it. We work with our hands; Willem do work with his head—yes, yes.'

The following day he was away again, much to his mother's discomfort, as his silent and wandering mood had always been.

If she had followed, she might have tracked him to his old storehouse of knowledge, Caerphilly Castle, and far down a crumbling flight of stone steps to a curious vault below the level of the moat, and, beneath that marvel of marvels, the reft, overhanging tower.

He had gathered, by inquiry from the vicar and others, that here had anciently been a furnace for the smelting of metals for coinage and other purposes; and that it was supposed to have been employed, during a siege, for melting lead to pour from the battlements upon the besiegers; and, further, that either the besiegers or some traitor within contrived to let in a jet of water from the moat upon the molten metal, causing the terrific explosion which rent the tower from top to bottom, and left the strongly-built half hanging eleven feet out of the perpendicular, as a testimony to future ages.

But it was not of battles or sieges William was thinking, unless it might be his own conflict with a difficulty. He was there to examine the ancient furnace,

with no one to talk or interrupt, and to found his own theories thereupon.

In a very short time Mr. Morris had his answer.

'Yes, sir, I think I can undertake your work.'

It was a bold undertaking for a farmer's son, self-taught, and only twenty years of age.

CHAPTER XXII.

A BLIND INSTRUCTOR.

MRS. EDWARDS did not readily reconcile herself to the loss of her faithful serving-maid Ales. Still less readily to the substitution of Cate, for, now that she was the wife of Rhys, she took another footing on the floor than when she was Cate Griffith, and she allowed no one to forget that the farm was left to Rhys by his grandfather's will, and, therefore, he was master, the implication being that she was mistress.

Hitherto Mrs. Edwards had been head and front of everything. As she had told Mr. Pryse, '*she* was the farmer.' It was for her to dictate, for others to obey.

Now, as she had foreseen, the marriage of Rhys had subverted all that. Not that Rhys himself had changed his manner towards his mother, but he had long held himself competent to manage the farm without guidance; and when there was no capable Ales at hand to anticipate her wishes, and even the orders she gave to her own daughter Jonet were apt to be disputed and reversed by the young wife, she felt much like a queen deposed. She did not, however, surrender her sceptre willingly,

but pursued her own course as of old. As little was Jonet disposed to take orders from her sister-in-law.

The consequent result was confusion, mismanagement, and altercation, Cate's voice having suddenly grown shrill and loud.

Of course Rhys took the part of his wife—though dubiously—whilst William and Davy enlisted on the side of the mother or Jonet; so that, although the oppressor was no more, and the sun of prosperity was rising over Brookside Farm, peace spread her weary wings for flight.

Outside, Jonet had an ally in Thomas Williams, and he did his best to console her with the prospect of escape to wifehood, and a home of her own—a home for which her own distaff and her mother's spinning-wheel were busily making preparation.

Hot-tempered William was, however, the first to shake the dust of the old home from his well-shod feet.

It was after a sharp altercation over the vexed question of home rule, which had left Jonet and his mother both in tears, that he startled them by saying—

'Well, well, really, I did never be expecting to turn my back on the old place with pleasure. But I am going to Cardiff next week, to be doing some building for Mr. Morris; and, look you, it is rejoicing I shall be to leave all this noise and contention behind.'

'Going away!' was the breathless, general exclamation, with varying addenda.

''Deed, and sure you're welcome! You do be the

most obstinate and worst-tempered of the whole lot,' from Cate.

'Well, Willem, I'll be sorry to be seeing the back of you; but sure and it may perhaps be the best for all,' added Rhys.

'What, going before I do be marrying?' questioned Jonet; 'but I don't wonder, anybody would be glad to get away.'

'Going to Cardiff? Oh, my dear boy, my Willem, what ever shall I be doing without you? Will you be long away?' cried his mother.

'Sure, and I cannot tell, mother dear. I may never come back to live here. And I am loth to leave you behind to be plagued with the "continual dropping" of a contentious woman, but I hope to have a farm of my own some day for you to manage, look you.'

Peace-loving Davy now put in his word, in lowered tones, to William and his mother.

''Deed, and I was be thinking for some time that the farm was not big enough to hold Cate and me. But if you be going away, Willem, I shall be staying to take care of mother here, till I can be making a home for her—yes, yes!' and he wrung William's hand as a token of brotherly love and trust.

In a very few days William was on his way to Cardiff, having taken a grateful farewell of the vicar on the Sunday; for, although Cardiff was little more than nineteen miles away, even by the Caerphilly route, they were more than equal to ninety in these steam and railroad times.

His mother parted from him with many rueful misgivings, and much good advice to resist the temptations sure to beset him in a wicked seaport town, much as an anxious country mother might in these days warn her untried son against the countless snares of London. And as she stitched her warmest flannel up into shirts for him, and looked up newly-knitted hose, her tears fell upon them silently as her prayers.

His personal belongings did not occupy much space. A few tools, chap-books and papers, and his entire wardrobe were comfortably packed in his father's old goatskin saddle-bags; and Robert Jones, with whom he had had several conferences of late on the qualities of stone from different quarries, found him a good steady horse which could be left at the Angel Inn until Robert claimed it on his next errand to Cardiff.

Robert Jones did him another service, the importance of which neither estimated at the time. He recommended him to apply for lodgings to a blind baker, named Walter Rosser, whose wife and niece were certain to make him comfortable.

The baker's shop was easily found, but there was some little hesitation about admitting a stranger as an inmate.

'What caused you to come hither in search of lodgings?' put the blind man, with his head on one side as if listening for the answer. 'And what may be your business in the town?'

'Robert Jones the peat-cutter did advise me to come here. He said you was honest and respectable and

book-learned, and that you would be dealing fairly with me. And that your wife did be keeping your house as sweet and clean as my own mother kept the farm. My business do be to build for Mr. John Morris, look you!'

'There's a clear ring in your voice, young man,' said the baker then. 'And what may be your name?'

'I am Willem Edwards, of Brookside Farm, Eglwysilan,' answered he, with proud decision—just a little nettled with the blind man's catechism.

'Oh,' said the other, 'I think I have heard of you before. You did build Owen Wynn's flour-mill. Yes, yes, we shall be glad to have you, sir. You perceive my infirmity compels me to be particular whom we receive under our roof, since I have a young niece here, who has neither father nor mother to watch over her, and we are bound to be careful for her sake.'

'Yes, yes, sure, quite right,' assented the young man, after a glance beyond the baker and his wife at a blushing damsel in the shade.

Shops at that period were constructed much as are Turkish shops to this day. Very few had glazed windows. At night they were closed in by flap shutters, divided horizontally; the lower half of which was lowered in the daytime to serve as a table or counter for the display of goods, the upper half being so hooked up by an iron rod as to serve for a screen from sun or rain. The shop doors were similarly divided, the upper half hooking up to the low ceiling inside. I have known many such doors in country towns in England, some of which are, no doubt, extant to this day.

It will be readily understood that shops of this description, however small, were dark in the background, and to eyes less keen than William's, Elaine Parry's blush would have passed unnoticed. It required after-observation to perceive how neat and trim she always was, how bashful and retiring, and how quiet and subdued were all her movements; what a steadfast light there was in her clear, hazel eyes, and what pretty dimples in her cheeks when she smiled.

He only noticed then that she remained quiescent when her uncle cried—

'Come in, sir—come in! I'll mind your horse whilst my good dame shows you the room we could let you have.'

Up one or two short flights of stairs with landings turning this way or that, then down a step into a short, dark passage or recess containing two doors, and he was ushered into a small bedroom, which to him was the perfection of order and comfort—nay, luxury. True, there was only a narrow truckle bedstead, with a flock bed upon it, dowlas[1] sheets, and a dark blue woollen coverlet, but he had never been accustomed to anything better; and there was a diamond-paned casement, with a table in front, on which was a coarse earthenware basin and ewer, and, hung against the wall, a looking-glass about the size of a sheet of note-paper, all luxurious intimations that his personal ablutions might be conducted in private. Then there was a fireplace in the room—just a couple of short iron bars fitted into the brickwork—and beside it, in a recess, a piece of furniture which puzzled William

[1] Dowlas, a coarse kind of linen.

extremely. Yet it was nothing more than an oaken bureau, the drawers of which Mrs. Rosser pulled open to show that they were for his use if he became their inmate. The mystery of the turn down flap for writing, the sliding rests to support its weight, and the enclosed pigeon-holes for papers was a revelation for the future.

He was almost afraid to ask 'How much?' and was wonderfully gratified to find the terms below his calculations, and also that he was expected to take his meals with the family.

All that settled, the door across the dark passage was opened, and a room with a larger casement was revealed. Here all was equally clean, from the well-scrubbed floor to the centre table and tall chairs ranged with stiff precision against the walls, whilst a broad seat beneath the window held piles of books, and the empty fireplace was adorned with large conch shells.

'You can come and sit here if you want to be quiet, and will not make a litter,' said Mrs. Rosser. 'We seldom use the room, except when my husband is teaching.'

'Teaching?' echoed William curiously,

'Oh yes; don't you know he teaches people to read English?'

'Does what?' he almost gasped.

Mrs. Rosser repeated her words.

'Then Robert Jones has been doing me the best turn he ever did yet, for, look you, I've been wanting to learn English reading for many a year.'

How it was possible for a blind man to give such

instruction was beyond his comprehension. He accepted the statement as one more of the marvels he had come across in the baker's comfortable home; and he brought in his saddle-bags, and gave his horse in charge to the baker's man, as if he were not sure he was wide awake.

He very soon discovered it was just the difference between living in a town of some antiquity within reach of a prosperous maritime city like Bristol, and dwelling apart among the mountain wilds, shut out from general intercourse, and dependent on itinerant packmen for everything but home produce.

Even in his meals there was some difference. If he still breakfasted on porridge, he was unaccustomed to see meat or eggs on the table daily, or to find the oven substituted for the big pot in cookery, and he missed the potatoes in which they indulged on the farm.

When the shyness between himself and Elaine Parry, Mrs. Rosser's pretty niece, had somewhat worn away, he told her this.

'Oh,' said she, 'they are too dear for us. They are two shillings a pound in Cardiff market.'

'No, indeed! Then I will tell Robert Jones. The farmers do be planting; they will be cheaper before long, look you.'

And before very long a sack of good potatoes was set down by Robert Jones at the baker's door, a present from Brookside Farm.

In the interim William Edwards had not been idle. The site selected for the smelting works was just outside Cardiff, and within easy reach of the river.

There materials had been collected, and with the sole assistance of John Llwyd, he built, in the first instance, a blast-furnace on a small scale, tapering like a cone, the ore and fuel for which had to be supplied from the top, there being an orifice below from which the molten metal would escape in a stream.

An ordinary smith's bellows worked by Llwyd supplied the blast, a good fire of peat and charcoal being well alight before the coal and broken-up ore were thrown in. It answered fairly for a trial, but once alight could not be allowed to cool night or day. But the furnace being built and in working order, there was no difficulty in finding men to tend and keep it going.

Of course this was an experiment on too small a scale for commercial success. At all events William Edwards had mastered the great problem how to utilise anthracite or stone-coal for the smelting of iron. It was there burning without smoke or flame, and pouring out a thin stream of molten metal into the sandy moulds which shaped it into bars, or pig-iron.

Mr. Morris clapped his hand on William's shoulder, and congratulated him on his achievement.

'Now, Edwards,' said he, 'you must lose no time in putting up another furnace or two on a larger scale. Let us show the world what genius and perseverance can accomplish.'

'Yes, yes, sir; but I should like to improve on *that*,' pointing to what he had already done. 'And before building a larger furnace, I shall have to consider how the greater blast is to be sustained. It would be too

heavy a task for manual labour if we are to keep large quantities of this hard coal at fusing heat for corresponding heaps of ore,' was the proud young fellow's reply.

'No doubt, no doubt,' acquiesced Mr. Morris. 'But you will be certain to manage it in some way or other. And you know you are free to employ any workmen or materials you think best. Oh yes; when you set your foot on a difficulty you are sure to tread it down.'

'Indeed and in truth, sir, I'm not willing to be beaten; and I don't mean to give in till I've conquered the obstacles here, look you,' said he, with set and resolute face.

How he overcame the mechanical difficulty I have no data to determine after this lapse of time; but I incline to think he brought his friend Thomas Williams to construct a wheel, moved either by horse or water power, to supply the leverage required to keep the monster forge-bellows in motion. Twenty years later Smeaton invented the blowing machine for the Carron Foundry, in Scotland; but William Edwards was a mason and architect, not a mechanical engineer; and when he had completed his large furnace, capable of smelting with the hard stone-coal, he had achieved a victory likely to revolutionise the mining and iron-founding industries of South Wales — nay, almost to create them. He had saved its forest trees from utter annihilation. He had paved the way for Smeaton's feet to tread.

Another furnace rose. The ironworks of John Morris

extended and found occupation and bread for hundreds of workpeople besides those employed by himself. Fresh mines of coal and iron were opened around Castel Coch and elsewhere. Whole teams of pack-horses, tended by women and boys, were ever on the roads, bringing rough ore and coal to the smelters, the tinkling bell of each leader, or bell-horse, ringing a prophetic note of progression. It was some time before the invention of a low, broad-wheeled waggon, drawn by four or six horses, set these old teams aside; not, indeed, until something had been done to make the roads more practicable. And long before that, fresh shipping sought the old Cardiff quays to transport the pig-iron to final manufacturers alike in England and across the seas. Morris' smelting works seemed to have wakened the stagnant town from the lethargy of ages.

All this was not the growth of a year or two. Eight full years was William Edwards working for Mr. Morris, and, whether consciously or not, for the advancement and prosperity of his country. Not alone was he occupied in erecting furnaces. Fresh workmen and their families required fresh homes, and who but William Edwards had the building? And for the period they were models. His name and fame as a builder travelled farther than his own feet.

Yet it is not to be supposed that he stood still to let the stream of progress pass him by, now that he had opened the floodgates wide.

Relays of men fed and tended the glowing furnaces night and day. The proud young architect

and his contingent did their masonry in daylight hours.

That did not mean inert repose or dissipation for him. He made holiday when his trial furnace was complete, to visit his mother and brothers and take part in his sister Jonet's wedding; but his brain was actively at work the whole time, and it was even on that busy occasion he set the bridegroom's mechanical brains at work also for mutual benefit.

And whenever there was an interval between one great piece of work and another, he hired a horse and went home for a day or two, never without some useful or rare gifts for one and all, and never without calling on his old friends Robert Jones and Evan Evans by the way.

Those were his only respites from work. His manual labour—for he worked alongside his men, and allowed no scamping or shirking—was over at dusk. But no sooner had he laid aside his tools, and washed away the tokens of his occupation, than he had a book in his hand—generally an English book, which he was doing his best to decipher unaided at his meals, as a preparation for private lessons, which the blind man gave to him by the household hearth, or in his bakehouse, or along with the adult class assembling twice a week in his upstairs parlour for English reading.

In the bakehouse Rosser kept an alphabet, the separate letters of which were shaped and baked out of ordinary dough. And when the eager student had mastered the English pronunciation of these, which the blind man

could distinguish by the touch, he traced syllables and words in his plastic medium, until ere long a well-known and well-thumbed book was put into the learner's hands to be spelt out, or read aloud, as he progressed.

The blind baker was proud of his pupil.

'You are the most promising scholar I ever took in hand,' said he; 'but your diligence is unremitting, and failure is impossible.'

Yes, so diligent was he that in consequence of his absorption in his new study, Elaine Parry's shyness in his presence gradually wore away, and when she heard him stumbling over a word, she would pronounce it for him involuntarily, without so much as looking up from her sewing or knitting.

Nay, the bashfulness became rather on his side at the betrayal of his own ignorance to a young girl, capable, through superior education, of correcting his slips and errors. But very soon he accepted her verbal hints as a matter of course.

Later, when in a difficulty, he did not scruple to rise from his seat and cross the hearth to point out a phrase or passage he was unable to translate. And she, perchance, would lay down her work, glance at his book, and look calmly up in his face as she gave the true reading in a clear, firm voice.

After a time, for easier reference, he brought his own seat near to hers, so that he might have her assistance without rising. And, although his dark-brown head and her light one were thus frequently drawn close together, his one idea had such thorough possession of him, that

ELAINE PARRY.

his single-minded desire for knowledge disarmed the seeming familiarity of all obtrusiveness.

Certainly, neither he nor Elaine had the slightest conception that anything was being taught or learned other than the King's English.

She was too retiring and well behaved to thrust herself into the prominent notice of a stranger, so that after that first general impression that the baker's niece was a pretty and tidy young woman, he scarcely bestowed a second thought upon her.

Mrs. Rosser's astounding intimation that her husband taught Welshmen to read English had swallowed up all minor considerations, just as the River Taff swallowed up all sorts of tributary streams in its course to the sea.

Then, apart from his lingual studies, his furnace-building was ever on his mind. It was a very great and novel undertaking, and the whole force of his intelligence was brought to bear upon it.

So that, although she moved before him in her daily occupations, and ministered to his necessities at meal-times, it was just as if a sister had been before his eyes continually. Certainly, she always wore shoes and stockings, and, on Sundays, the very set of her cloak and tall hat, and the border of white linen cap, had a grace and fitness most becoming. And she carried her English prayer-book to church so unobtrusively, and found her places so readily, he was bound to notice that; but *there* some envy blunted the edge of admiration.

Her influence was that of summer dew on vegetation. It refreshes insensibly and imperceptibly. Had she

bustled about noisily, had there been any discord between her and her aunt, it would have arrested his attention with the jarring effect of a thunderstorm.

As it was, she became part and parcel of his daily life, and it was not until he had been about three years in Cardiff that a slight illness which kept her in her own room for a week or ten days roused him to the consciousness how much he was indebted to her for the comfort and brightness of his surroundings.

However intelligent a companion Walter Rosser might be—and he could talk both of the world and of books, having known both before blindness set in—he lacked just the touch of kindly appreciation so gratifying to the self-esteem of the rising young builder after years of home-snubbing; the word or two of discriminating opinion his niece gave so thoughtfully whenever doubts and difficulties beset him in the execution of his plans; for all was not fair sailing, clever as he might be, and there were times when he was glad of a sympathetic ear.

He was restless and uneasy the whole time she lay ill upstairs, and was ready to ransack the town for tea, oranges, or any other over-sea luxury she might fancy. And he was never the same to her, or she to him, after she was back by the household fire, paler, but oh! how infinitely dearer!

The touch of his horny hand, and the softened tones of his voice, said more than his commonplace words of greeting: 'Deed, Elaine, it's right glad we are to have you downstairs again. We have been missing you so terribly.'

And there was more than the tremulousness of physical weakness in her low reply: 'Yes, and I am glad to be here. It is miserable to be shut up away from you all, giving aunt and you so much trouble; but we may bear with illness when friends are so kind.'

CHAPTER XXIII

BRIDGE-BUILDING.

IT so happened that when William Edwards had taken his first holiday, in 1741, to be groomsman at the marriage of his sister Jonet with his friend Thomas Williams, that he had found Caerphilly—nay, all Eglwysilan — in a state of ferment, owing to the exciting presence in their midst of the noted preacher, the Rev. George Whitfield, for many years the colleague of the Rev. John Wesley, and only recently separated from him through doctrinal difference.

They had alike left their pulpits in the Church to go preaching and teaching throughout the land, in the highways and by-ways, denouncing the vice and folly and sin then rampant, calling sinners to repentance, admonishing their hearers to lead simple, pure, and Christ-like lives, and preaching the acceptable year of the Lord, at the same time holding, as it were, the flaming sword of God's wrath over the impenitent.

It should here be told that, finding his dear mother made light of by Cate, and set aside on the farm so very recently her own, William had himself taken the first opportunity that presented itself to remove her

and Jonet to a farm he had acquired in the Aber Valley—not far from his friend Thomas Williams—a farm for his mother and Davy to manage between them.

His road hither, of course, lay through Caerphilly; and after having left the town behind him nearly two miles, he was surprised to find a concourse of people in a field by the wayside, not far from his own home, listening to a man in a clerical gown and bands, who stood on a pile of stones, and, with impassioned voice and gesture, besought his hearers to 'flee from the wrath to come.' His text had evidently been: 'To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart;'[1] and he hammered at the 'to-day' until he drove it into the hearts of many around him. Women wept, men fell on their knees and called out aloud as emotion swayed them, and William sat like a statue until the last word was spoken and the preacher, worn out with his own fervour, turned to depart along with some friends of his own.

William, like scores beside him, had gone to church and read his Bible as a duty; had learned the catechism the good vicar drilled into the youth of his flock; but beyond that his religion did not go very deep.

George Whitfield's sermon, on which he had come so suddenly, was like the bow drawn at a venture, the sharp arrow from which smote the King of Israel between the joints of his armour; for so it pierced the heart of

[1] Psalm xcv. 7, 8.

the young man, whose very thought of late had been of furnace-building and of English study.

The face, the voice, the manner of the earnest preacher haunted him no less than his awakening words. And when Davy, who had been also a listener, laid his hand upon the horse's bridle, and spoke to him, he started like one aroused from a dream.

To suit general convenience—the old vicar's included—it had been arranged that Jonet and Thomas Williams should be married at St. Martin's, Caerphilly—then only a chapel-of-ease to Eglwysilan; and there a fresh surprise awaited William Edwards, for when, the following day, the united wedding party from Brookside and Aber dashed helter-skelter along the road to the church, in their race to catch the bride, he beheld a gravely-attired procession on foot, somewhat ahead of them, proceeding calmly in the same direction. And, when their own panting steeds had been left behind at a convenient inn, he observed that, of the more decorous bridal party entering the church porch, the bridegroom, a man of some twenty-seven years, was no other than that same Rev. George Whitfield, whose words had burnt themselves into his breast, never to be effaced, and his bride, Elizabeth James, whom he knew by sight.

He could scarcely keep his eyes off the man, or his attention on the business before him. Yet he could not fail to notice that the aged vicar, who was growing feeble and tremulous, was apparently conscious he had no ordinary couple before him to unite in holy matrimony, and performed the ceremony for both parties with unusual

impressiveness, undisturbed by the sounds of giggling and tittering in the rear.

Such giggling and tittering were of common occurrence, as was the rough struggle for the first kiss of the newly-made bride, and the Rev. John Smith raised no voice in rebuke or protest when such a rush was made towards Jonet.

Not so the evangelistic bridegroom. No sooner were their names signed in the register, than with his bride upon his arm, he quitted the church. Then, surrendering her to the care of the sedate groomsman, he mounted a tombstone, and with uplifted hand and voice demanded attention.

So unwonted was the proceeding, that even the most hilarious paused and drew near out of mere curiosity; but when they left the chapelyard they had received such a lecture on the reverence due to the sacred place, on the solemnity of the ceremony they were present to witness, and on the import for time and eternity of the vows there made in the sight of God—such a lecture as few of those there assembled were likely to forget.

At its close, William, withdrawing from his companions, walked up to Mr. Whitfield and thanked him heartily for his discourses, both there and the previous afternoon. 'You have roused me from spiritual apathy and carelessness into which I never shall sink again,' he said, with characteristic decision. 'And should you come to Cardiff before you leave South Wales, you may count on me as an awakened hearer.'

The preacher's influence did not soon die away. William had other opportunities for joining in the services led by the enthusiastic preacher, and in his zeal prevailed on the blind baker and his niece to bear him company. Rosser's infirmity threw him much within himself. Elaine was naturally of a serious cast, and the eloquence of the powerful revivalist moved them both greatly.

This was long before the girl's illness to which I have already referred. But as William and her uncle conversed together on the great truths they had heard so powerfully expounded, or joined in household prayer, there can be no doubt a link was forged and strengthened to draw the young people closer together, however insensibly, than if they had spent their leisure in light chatter and frivolous fooling. Yet nothing had been said in the course of years of either love or marriage.

Meanwhile William had made himself conversant with English. Then, at the instance of Rosser, he procured the works of Sir Isaac Newton, and devoted himself to the study of geometry and kindred sciences with the assiduity of a man bent on success.

Barely had he completed his furnaces for Mr. John Morris when proposals for like work came to him from other quarters, offering him most liberal and gratifying terms.

Then, and not before, did he open out all his heart to Elaine, and, proud of the distinction it implied, pressed her to become his wife before he closed his engagement

with his first patron, or entered upon a fresh one which would remove him to a distance.

He had come upon Elaine in the twilight as she stood behind the flap-counter of her uncle's open shop, with a few unsold loaves upon the board, and, elate with the prospect before him, never doubted she who had grown so dear to his heart would gladly put her hand in his to share his rising fortunes.

He drew her closer to him as he stood beside her in the shade, and met with no repulse, for she owned she knew his worth and loved him dearly, but his soaring spirit drooped its wings under a sudden check.

'Nay, nay, dear William,' she said, amid slowly falling tears, 'it cannot be. How I shall miss you, and grieve for you in your absence, there is no telling; but though I can marry no one else, I cannot leave my good uncle and aunt now they are getting into years. They have been all the father and mother I have known.'

'But, my dearest Elaine, do not daughters leave their parents to become wives? I never expected such an answer from *you*. Surely, when I took that farm in the Aber Valley years ago, had I no deeper meaning than to make my mother and David more comfortable? Had you no suspicion that one day I should want to place my wife there, and make a home for both of us?'

Her tears dropped on the strong hand that held hers in its clasp, but she answered never a word.

'Elaine, dear Elaine,' he went on, 'I can enlarge the homestead, and extend the farm lands, so that your uncle and aunt could live with us all under one roof, if you will but consent.'

'Don't, don't, William dear,' she sobbed. 'It is very, very kind of you, but it would never answer. You must not even suggest such a thing to my uncle. He is proud of his double calling as baker and teacher. How often have you heard him say with pride "he provided food for both body and mind; and no man with both his eyes could do more"? No, you would wound his self-dependence. I honour your good heart, but — I cannot leave them.'

'Is there no one else can take your place, Elaine? How am I to leave you here alone?'

She shook her head. 'They have no one but their married daughter in Bristol. What sort of a wife should I make if I failed in my duty to them? Besides, a wife just now would only cripple your freedom of action. We are both young enough to wait.'

'Young enough if willing.' His obstinate temper was rising.

'If it be God's will, it should be our will.' As she spoke she withdrew from his clasp.

'Look you, Elaine!' he exclaimed, with something of his old passion. 'The more a string is stretched, the sooner it breaks.' And away he went in high displeasure, leaving her standing there faint with her own effort at self-suppression.

It did not rest there. He was persistent. She was firm. And he had neither won her consent to marry, nor come to terms for the construction of fresh smelting works, when another project was on foot, which was to make or mar the man.

I have said that roads were defective, and that bridges were needed to span rivers which cut off communication between town and town, county and county, and shut up the vast mineral wealth of South Wales.

Herbert, the new Lord of Cardiff, had made the Castle his residence, the discoveries in connection with Mr. Pryse having determined him to see with his own eyes, and to delegate irresponsible authority to no one. He strengthened the hands of Mr. Morris in his efforts to utilise the iron and coal of the county, and to provide remunerative work for the depressed population. And he did what he could to improve, not merely the decaying town, but the rest of his vast possessions in Glamorganshire. He soon became keenly alive to the necessity for better communication with his property on the other side of the Taff than that of ferry, or ford, or coracle.

In this he was by no means alone.

Other landowners, magistrates, and men who saw fortunes buried beneath the soil, or losing half their value upon it for want of accessible markets, grumbled and growled on their own hearths, or to each other when they chanced to meet, until the discontent became so general that the heads of the county met

in conclave at the Angel Inn in Cardiff, and decided on the erection of a stone bridge over the treacherous Taff.

Then came the question, 'Who should be the builder?'

'There is no better builder whatever in all South Wales than Mr. William Edwards,' said Mr. Morris, with decision.

'Indeed, and that's the truth,' came simultaneously from various speakers.

'But he has never erected a bridge, and he is so very young,' put in another dubiously. 'It will be a work of difficulty. We should engage an architect of established repute.'

'He never put up a mill until he built Owen Wynn's flour-mill, and he never put up a furnace until he built mine,' replied Mr. Morris; 'and you all know what those are. But, young as he is, you may take my word for it he will undertake nothing he is not competent to carry out, and he is certain to accomplish whatever he has set his mind upon.'

A good deal of heated argument followed this speech.

The former speaker adhered to his suggestion that 'some one of more eminence should be engaged—such a man, for instance, as Mr. James Gibbs, an architect of note.'

His lordship shook his head. 'Yes; Mr. Gibbs is an ecclesiastical architect of note, but you require a bridge, not a church, or a '—

'What? That old *Scotchman*!' burst from impatient lips. 'Did he ever build a bridge? And what should a Scotchman know of our Welsh rivers? And what would he charge?'

That suggestion of an exorbitant cost virtually settled the business before Mr. Morris rose again, and with a wave of the hand to calm the patriotic hubbub, remarked—

'I think, gentlemen, you will have to fall back on Mr. William Edwards. He is confessedly the best builder in all South Wales—a practical builder, not a mere architect. He was but a boy about nine years of age when he told me his father had been drowned in crossing the Eglwysilan ford, and that when he was a big man he would build a bridge there to save other lives. Believe me, he would put his heart into the work. And *he* is not an alien.'

On the following day, September 16, 1746, three gentlemen, dressed in deep vests, full-skirted coats, and three-cornered hats, more or less in conformity with English wear, presented themselves at the baker's shop, and asked to see Mr. Edwards.

They were shown upstairs into the class-room parlour by Elaine, and then she tapped gently at William's door opposite in the dark passage, and told him he was wanted.

He was at that moment seated, pen in hand, in front of his bureau-desk, with a sheet of paper before him, on which he had begun to indite his acceptance of the smelter's proposal.

Who could be wanting him?

Down went his quill; he thrust his arms into the short-tailed coat hung over his chair back, gave himself a shake, and in less than two minutes he was face to face with Mr. Morris and two strangers, to whom he was formally introduced as *Mr.* William Edwards. They were magistrates, and men of note in the county, deputed to lay before him the project for bridging over the Taff, and ascertain his willingness to undertake its construction.

Mr. Morris had placed himself in the broad window seat, his friends had drawn a couple of the high-backed chairs between the window and the table to bring them closer together, and as William stood there with the full light of the setting sun upon his somewhat square features, they could perceive him start and rest one strong nervous hand upon the table, whilst his broad nostrils quivered, his bright clear eyes lit up, and his face flushed, only to whiten under the excitement of their proposal, and the remembrance of the unfinished letter upon his desk.

There could be no second thought of his acceptance.

'Willing to undertake it, gentlemen?' he said breathlessly. 'Competent? It has been my dream from boyhood; though I owe the first suggestion to a jesting hint from Mr. Morris. Stay, I will show you.'

In less than three minutes he had fetched from the bureau in the other room — where he left a

crumpled-up letter — several drawings of bridges in all stages of architectural finish, from the first rude conception of his youth, to the riper studies of manhood.

By the time his contract with Mr. Morris expired, his design for the proposed bridge had been considered and approved, as also the site, close upon the Eglwysilan ford, midway between Merthyr Tydvil and Cardiff, so as to unite the already beaten road.

He was elate and buoyant over the trust reposed in him; although Rhys, his mother, Davy, and other friends had been called upon to enter into bonds for the fulfilment of his contract, since he was to be paid as the work proceeded.

The intending smelter, desirous to secure his services, consented to wait until he was again at liberty.

The young architect's pride had but one drawback. He could not shake Elaine's fidelity to her uncle and aunt. She would not desert them in their old age.

'It will be better for you to go to this great work unfettered by a wife,' she argued bravely.

But he would not see the personal sacrifice she made, and went off at last in a huff.

'This new business will be his solace,' she said. 'I must be content to do my duty, and leave the rest to God.'

And neither her aunt nor her blind uncle knew the

temptation she had resisted for their sakes, though they thought her quieter than before.

She was right. His new business left William little leisure for looking back.

He had gone over to Bristol to engage masons, in addition to those he had already trained, before he finally took leave.

Then there was no running back. His first duty was to erect huts or houses for his workpeople and their families; and he took care they were such as should be of service when the temporary purpose was served.

He had long before made John Llwyd his foreman —a good deputy on whom he could rely; just as he could depend on his old friend Robert Jones for the best of stone from the very best local quarries, or for his sand and lime. For the carriage of other matters to and fro he fell back on Robert's active young partner Hughes, for whom the peat-cutter's niece had jilted easy-going Davy.

But ere the foundations of the bridge were laid and firm, the builder had engaged his brother-in-law, Thomas Williams, to supply the wooden frames on which his arches were to be fitted and adjusted. And so, with trustworthy coadjutors like these, the work went on steadily.

At first he had to battle with the deceitful river; but he and his men watched the skies and did their best to prevent disaster, though more than one occurred.

But the resolution of their master seemed infused into the men. If there was any doubt or hazard, he took the tools himself, and wrought until they were ashamed to hang back.

Though he had a farm of his own but two miles or so away, and his brother's farm was close at hand, he occupied one of the new cottages along with Llwyd, and so was always on the spot.

Besides that, he fared almost as his men fared. If a labourer's wife or child fell sick he helped them from his own stores or pocket; and his men worked all the better for his thoughtful kindness.

His bridge-building had brought quite a colony upon the spot, not merely of the workpeople, but of others, who found they had money to spend and wants to be supplied.

Soon he become conscious of another want. The Rev. John Smith, the kind old vicar, had died full of years shortly after Jonet's marriage, and the new vicar did not seem to recognise the strangers as part of his flock. So William, finding the non-observance of the Sabbath led to disorder, called the people round him, and from the Druids' rocking-stone read out portions of Scripture to them, now and then venturing on expositions of his own.

So the weeks and the seasons rounded until at the end of two years there stood a fine three-arched bridge across the river, to be opened with loud acclaim and rejoicing—a bridge the excited guarantors pronounced firm and solid enough to stand as surely for seventy

years as seven, the period for which its stability was guaranteed.

'Indeed!' exclaimed the proud young builder. 'It is more likely to stand firm for seven hundred years!'

CHAPTER XXIV.

PONT-Y-PRIDD.

IT was a glorious day for the self-taught architect. The hanging woods on either bank of the river held nearly as many spectators as trees, whilst along the narrow roads came a motley multitude on foot or horseback, or in cumbrous, top-heavy leather carriages, drawn by four horses (less for state than necessity), poor as well as rich having assembled from all parts to witness the opening of the new bridge that was to do so much for the county.

'To witness my triumph,' William Edwards phrased it. But then, too much diffidence was not the family failing. And, for a self-taught man, it *was* a triumph.

There was no room for two carriages to pass abreast, but the few there assembled crossed alternately, the Viscount's prancing horses leading the way. Then there was a rush of people, mounted and on foot; horses, ponies, mules, and asses scampering across pell-mell in such wild confusion and entanglement, amid shouts and untranslatable cries, as certainly tested the stability of the structure. And such congratulations greeted the

builder as were calculated to turn more seasoned heads than his.

Davy, full of brotherly pride and affection, had brought his mother on a pillion behind him; and there, surrounded by her children and her grandchildren, the old dame, overcome by her emotion in contrasting the present with the past, and witnessing the great work of her son and his reception by the gentry, fairly sobbed aloud, the big tears rolling down her tanned and wrinkled cheeks.

'Name o' goodness, mother, I don't be knowing what you have got to cry for, whatever. People do be looking at you!' remarked Rhys curtly, on a hint from Cate.

''Deed, I do be crying for joy. I never expected to be seeing a day like this.'

'Do leave mother alone, Rhys,' quickly remonstrated Davy in an undertone. 'Her heart do be full, and it must run over, look you.'

Evan Evans and Ales stood by, dressed in their Sunday best for the great occasion, a newly-breeched boy by the hand.

'I do be wishing Jane Edwards would not be washing the new bridge with her tears, Evan — 'deed, I do,' whispered Ales to him.

'Ah, yes, it do be a bad baptism,' he echoed, shaking his head, which had been crammed with superstition on shipboard. 'And I do be hoping the rain will keep off, for the clouds be gathering over Garth Mountain, look you.'

The rain did keep off for two or three hours, until long after the hand-shaking and speech-making were over, and the great people had dispersed, and all who had not stayed behind to feast were on their way homewards, thankful they would be able in future to cross the river dry-shod and out of danger, whatever the hour or the weather, the 'cleverness' of the Widow Edwards' son being on every tongue.

That son, however, had been surfeited with praise, and was moving amongst the crowds in irritable reaction seeking for some one he failed to find—some one whose approbation would have o'ertopped the highest.

At last, when he was ready to bite his lips with vexation, a boy, who came riding hastily from the Cardiff Road, put a letter in his hand, and lingered as if waiting for an answer.

The writing was Elaine's.

The letter was torn open impatiently.

Only a few blotted words:—

'Dear Friend,—We hear your meritorious work is complete, and send you our heartfelt greetings; but we are in great trouble, for Uncle Rosser had a fit last night, and has not spoken since. Aunt is full of grief. She has sent to Bristol for my cousin, for the apothecary says uncle cannot live. You will pardon our absence to-day; and believe me, your sincere well-wisher,

'Elaine Parry.'

Two hours later he had left the feasters and was in

the saddle, muffled in a thick riding-coat, speeding on to Cardiff through driving rain and the darkening shades of evening.

When he drew rein at the baker's door he was too late for all but consolation. The blind man had opened his long-closed eyes on the glorious wonders of eternity.

Never had Elaine felt so much the need of his strong arm and self-reliant individuality as then, in their overwhelming affliction. His unexpected arrival touched a sensitive chord and broke down the barriers between them. She sprang towards him, and clung to him weeping, as she had never done before.

Amazement checked the flow of Mrs. Rosser's tears for the moment; and when he put out his hand to grasp hers, she too felt there was a strong friend to rely on in their extremity.

Then was it first observed that he was wringing wet; and in hospitable cares for the long absent, the first acuteness of pain was something blunted.

After that, as if he had been Mrs. Rosser's own son, he took all miserable details off their feminine hands. It was he, too, who met the daughter—Mrs. Elton—and her Bristolian husband on their arrival, and broke the distressing intelligence to them.

Death involves changes. No sooner was the dead laid in the earth than the desirability of the widow's future residence with her daughter was openly discussed. Consideration for Elaine appeared the only obstacle to the plan.

'I am quite willing to make a home for my mother-in-law,' said Mr. Elton in private to Mr. Edwards, with a show of self-complacent liberality, much as though he patted himself on the back for a praiseworthy sacrifice, ignoring the savings of years likely to bear her company; 'but I cannot consent to burden myself with the young woman. And she cannot really expect it. She is no relation of mine or my wife's. She must look out for a situation. She quite blocks the way to an amicable adjustment of affairs,' he added irritably.

William speedily removed *that* block out of their way.

'Do not trouble yourself about Elaine, sir,' put in William stiffly. 'There has been a situation waiting for her over two years.'

Mr. Elton opened his eyes. 'Indeed!'

'Yes, sir. Two years back I pressed her to become my honoured *wife*, but her strong sense of duty constrained her to repress her own inclinations, and send me away wifeless rather than desert her aunt and uncle in their old age. You can adjust your affairs irrespective of Elaine Parry, I can assure you. A good home and a loving welcome await her.'

Mr. Elton was snubbed, and looked it.

In less than three months there was a very quiet wedding at Cardiff, and Elaine went away with her husband to his farm, midway between his bridge and the ruined Castle of Caerphilly, where his old mother and Davy lived, within easy reach of Jonet and her husband. The few houses have multiplied since then into a village that bears the name of Aber.

At first old Mrs. Edwards felt as if she was to be a second time deposed. And she expected Elaine's town ways would clash with her country ones. But when she found that Elaine deferred to her as she had done to her own aunt, and was desirous to be instructed in all that pertained to her duties on the farm, there was no word too good for her 'clever son William's clever wife.'

Then she could already knit and spin, and had brought her own wheel, as well as a shelf of books, and something in hard cash, so that, as Davy said, she was 'quite an acquisition on the farm.'

William had built the house according to his enlarged ideas of domestic comfort. There were two storeys, and notwithstanding the very heavy tax on glass, it shone in every window, and these were of useful size. He had brought home along with his wife the bureau he had found so useful for his papers, and kept them and his books in a room set apart for himself.

With the completion of the bridge, he abandoned to John Llwyd the cottage he had erected on the river's side, his new furnace work being within sufficiently accessible distance of the farm, so long as he could leave his efficient foreman on the spot, and his workmen also. He was glad then he had erected permanent and commodious houses for the men, instead of temporary huts, since there was still employment for them all. Explorations for iron and coal were going on in the vicinity. These created a fresh demand for labour, and

a corresponding demand for roofs to shelter the new-comers.

As he beheld the new colony of labourers and managers rising up, as it were, under his auspices, his heart swelled with pride and self-sufficient inflation.

'Ah, yes,' he would say to his wife, 'this is all my doing. I told Rhys I would be the greater man. Yes, he must own it now, if he would not then. Look at my wonderful bridge. It will stand for ever.'

He was saying something of the kind one morning, when his first-born, a boy he had named David after his brother, was about eighteen months old. He had the child on his knee at the time.

Elaine had a shuddering dread upon her whenever she heard his boastful words.

'Yes, William dear,' she said soberly, 'we know your skill is great, but I wish you would not boast of the stability of your bridge so often. We, as well as the bridge, are in the hands of the Almighty!'

He put the child down hastily and rose to his feet. 'Surely, Elaine, you are not going to join the croakers? Rhys told me the other day, "Not to hold my head so high, for pride was sure to have a fall." Sure, I have a right to be proud if any one has.'

'*If?*' murmured Elaine under her breath; but he caught the doubtful word, and, snatching at his hat, strode out of the house angrily.

A thick mantle of snow covered hill and valley, against which the whitewashed houses looked grey and dingy.

'It do be thawing fast,' said Davy to him as they met at the gate, he with a spade over his shoulder. 'I do hope the rain will be keeping off till the snow be all gone. But I don't be liking the looks of the clouds in the north-west.'

'Why not?' questioned William sharply.

Davy hesitated. 'Well, if the rain do come upon the melting snow, we shall be having heavy floods.'

'Well, and what then?' snappily.

''Deed, and I do be always thinking of the bridge when the floods come.'

'Pouf! the bridge is safe if a hundred floods come.' And on he went, ruffled, but wrapped in self-opinionated vanity. He had forgotten George Whitfield and his Master then.

Nevertheless, he went to take a look at the bridge and the river, on his way to the new ironworks, where his first furnace was already at work.

'Ah, well,' he thought, 'the water *is* high; but, pouf! that is no flood.'

Towards afternoon a thin rain began to fall and liquefy the melting snow. As the men were leaving work, Llwyd came up to him with an anxious face and whispered, 'Master, the river do be desperately full, and if'—

William looked as if he could have struck his faithful monitor to the earth.

Yes, the river was rising and racing through the three arches with the swiftness of a torrent, surcharged with hay and straw, brushwood and mould, washed

downward in its course, but they swept well under the bold archways and swirled away in eddies beyond.

'There can be no danger. Those piers are firm enough,' he muttered, as if to convince himself as well as Llwyd.

Dusk came down and blotted out the scene. In turning away he came upon Rhys, whose gloomy face it was well he could not see.

Llwyd and Davy too were there, with other watchers who had helped to rear the bridge.

'Tell Elaine I shall stay with Llwyd to-night,' said William to Davy. It was his first note of apprehension. Towards midnight he said, 'If the rain ceases there can be no danger.'

But the rain did not cease. As the night fled and the morning hours advanced, the winds came howling and tearing like demons down the Taff Valley, driving the pelting rain before them in a mad hurricane, fighting for mastery alike with tall green pines and the bare boughs of elms and gnarled oaks.

Gradually, as lapping waters undermined rocks and rugged banks, already loosened by frost and melting snows, along many a swollen mountain stream the surging torrent bore down their tributary reeds and shrubs and earth, along with riven boughs and uptorn trees, that beat like battering-rams against the good stone piers, holding their trust so sturdily. Then, eddying, the mighty current of the mocking Taff swung the tall fir-trees round and barred the still open arches, cross-wise, one by one. Here, as in a net, the lament-

able wreckage of the moors, of ruined cots and devastated farms, was caught and built up into a dam the turbid water could neither pass nor wash away. And rising, still rising, rising swifter than the rising sun, like a gigantic monster playing with boulder stones for bowls, the resistless river hammered with them against the parapet, and beat it in. Then, with a tumultuous roar as of triumph, and a deafening crash that startled sleepers in their beds more than a mile distant, the bridge that was built for centuries was swept away into irreparable ruin.

A shriek, as of mortal horror, rose as an echo from the crowded banks. The three brothers and their friends looked in each other's whitened faces as the cost of the catastrophe cut keenly into their souls.

Rhys groaned aloud.

'There does never have been such an awful flood since I was born; no masonry whatever could be standing against it,' cried grey-headed Owen Griffith, as he leant upon his staff to bear up against the wind.

He had seen the darkening glances cast on the luckless architect, and interposed to spare him the reproaches of coarse tongues.

'Keep that consolation for those who have run no risk. It will not be saving Cate and the rest from ruin and beggary, through this braggart brother of mine and his bridge,' burst from ungovernable Rhys.

'It may *save* me and you all from ruin,' retorted William defiantly. 'I have discovered what a flood can do, and what must be guarded against. Before the

term of our guarantee expires, I will span this river with a bridge no flood shall wash away. 'Deed I will.'

A crowd had gathered. There were mocking voices heard beside Rhys'. A quarrel and a tumult threatened; for fierce as the war of the elements was the tempest raging in the breasts of men who had been closest friends.

'Come away,' cried placable Davy, linking his arm within William's, and looking round him. 'When the Lord do be speaking men should be silent. Yes, and before the breath of His nostrils the best man's handiwork will go down, look you.' And whispering something to his baited brother of 'home' and 'Elaine,' he drew him peaceably away.

He had no word of reproach, though he had staked the savings of his life, equally with Rhys, and his forbearance silenced others, then and afterwards.

Nor did any reproaches or taunts meet William at his own fireside. Rumour had run fleetfooted before them with the disastrous tidings. The shock had thus been anticipated. Clasping arms and sympathetic words alone awaited him. 'It is the will of God,' said both mother and wife; 'it is useless to rebel.'

Strange to say, William Edwards was apparently the least cast down of any. In a day or two he had recovered much of his elasticity. He showed a brave face to friends and envious foes, and maintained that no man should forfeit his guarantee. He would replace the wrecked bridge with a better.

There were men who sneered; there were more who

sympathised, for the rebuilding would be at his own cost, and would sweep away all his former gains. Yet all friends did not desert him. Mr. Morris and the Viscount defended him against malicious attacks on 'unqualified pretenders.' No one could deny the vehement pressure of the terrible flood.

His newer plan, a bridge of *a single arch*, and of a span unprecedented, was seen and approved.

Workmen were not far to seek. Almost with the subsidence of the waters labourers were at work removing the still upstanding remains of the old piers, the tenacity of the masonry giving the undaunted builder fresh hope.

On fresh foundations another bridge arose, Jonet's husband marvelling at the measurements supplied for the wooden framework.

'Yes,' said William, whose pride and self-assumption rose as he surveyed the magnificent proportions of his bridge, 'I defy any flood to beat that down. Look at its breadth and height! Any volume of water could sweep under that arch! Yes, indeed, if it brought half a forest down with it. The piers were the mistake before, Thomas.'

''Deed, yes!' assented the other.

The keystone of the arch had been laid; time had been given for cement to harden; the wooden framework of the arch was being removed when this was said; only the parapets were wanting, and on those the men were beginning.

Another day the last scrap of timber was gone.

ONLY HIS WIFE CAN ENTER INTO HIS FEELINGS, AND ALLEVIATE HIS BITTER HUMILIATION.—*See page* 327.

Rhys had come down sullenly to the water's edge, weighted by his responsibility, and too doubtful of his brother's skill to give even his perseverance credit. There he found Jonet and Elaine, each with an infant in her arms. A few idlers stood staring and gaping under the trees on the steep banks.

All at once, with no more premonitory shock than a slight tremulous motion under foot that scared the working masons away, the keystone of the arch shot up into the air like a ball; the centre of the arch seemed to rise bodily and press upwards like an inverted V, as if impelled by superhuman force from the sides; there was a report as of a tremendous gunpowder explosion, a blinding shower of dust and flying stones whirling in mid air, a wide gap where a noble structure had been five minutes before.

Draw a curtain over the scene of the collapse. Close the ears to the taunts and mockery, the scorn and derisive epithets, which assail the unfortunate architect wheresoever he goes. Everywhere, save under his own roof, where wife and mother and Davy combined to shield him. But only his wife can enter into his feelings, and alleviate his bitter humiliation. Where he is weak, she is strong, and her very touch is healing.

Let us follow him into his little private room, and find him on his knees acknowledging in all humility his self-sufficient dependence on himself, his proud and confident trust in his own skill, his forgetfulness of the Lord, omnipotent alike to create and to destroy, from

whom he derived whatever mental superiority he possessed, who had led him step by step to success, who had spoken to him by the warning voice of George Whitfield, and at last had broken his stubborn heart, and, with the thunders of calamity, brought him to acknowledge that, 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.'

Out of that room he walked that day another manner of man.

He was the first to confess that the haunches or side foundations of his bridge had not sufficient strength to bear the strain of the lofty and expansive arch he had imposed upon them. But he added, '*Please God*, I will yet, *with His help*, fulfil my contract, and build a bridge that shall stand, even if it leave me penniless.'

Fonder was Elaine of her husband in his humility and misfortune than in the pride of his success.

Davy had always stuck by him. 'He set no store by his bit of money whatever. William was welcome to every penny, if it was any good.'

Others, richer than Davy, who had held aloof from the 'self-confident amateur,' as they called him, were moved by his newly-developed modesty, no less than by his indomitable perseverance and resolution (Rhys called it obstinacy) in the face of catastrophes that would have overwhelmed weaker men. And they honoured his integrity. When his fresh plans were ready, funds to 'assist' were ready also.

Over those plans he had pondered and prayed. Like

a flash it came to his mind that, as the single arch was a strength in masonry, a double arch — that is, a circle—must have double strength, and on that he formed his plan, to bind the haunches of his bridge with cylinders of decreasing sizes, not to narrow his span of arch.

Once more the river-bed was cleared. But on the Sunday, before a stone of the new bridge was laid, he summoned his workpeople around him in the Druids' circle, and, standing upon the rocking-stone, he preached to them from the text, 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it,' telling the story of his sudden conversion, of the failure of his other bridges as providential instruments to save him from overweening arrogance and self-sufficiency; and wound up with an exhortation that they should lay every stone as if they laid it before the Lord, who alone could decide whether this or that man's work was good or bad.

And so, week by week, as the work went on, Sunday by Sunday he preached and prayed amongst his men on that Druidical altar, consecrating it afresh to the living God, and dedicating himself and his life to the service of Christ.

In like manner, when the last coping-stone was in its place, and his workmen had gathered up their tools to depart, he knelt down upon the bridge, and dedicated that with prayer, saying at the last, 'Keep Thy servant from presumptuous sins. And be the glory Thine, O Lord.'

Thus, in 1755, when William Edwards was but thirty-six, he had completed his trinity of bridges over the terrible Taff. And there to this day it stands, fair to see, with the date of its erection upon it, a bridge with a wider span than the Venetian Rialto—a bridge pierced by three hollow cylinders on either side, rising gracefully with the magnificent arch as they decrease in size.[1]

Upon the opening day, apart from the peasantry, the magnates of three counties flocked to see this wonder of a bridge, and the indomitable man who had created it, in the face of difficulties that would have daunted weaker men.

As one by one Welshmen of note bent from horse or carriage to shake hands with Mr. Edwards and congratulated him on the unrivalled structure his genius had created, and he was heard to say modestly in reply, 'I trust, with the blessing of God, *this* bridge will stand,' even Rhys admitted that, ''Deed, after all, Willem was a great man,' and Thomas Williams kept close beside him, as if desirous to share in his employer's glory.

For Mr. Morris, the staunch friend of William Edwards, there with due ceremony, breaking a bottle of wine upon the parapet, had named the bridge 'Pont-y-Pridd'—The Bridge of Beauty.

And when the loud acclaim had subsided, the speaker gave as a reason for the name, not alone the wondrous beauty of the structure, or the new features the self-

[1] The largest is nine feet in diameter.

THE BRIDGE OF BEAUTY, 1755.

trained builder had introduced into bridge-building, but that out of his failures he had built up an undoubted success, and out of seeming calamities built up another, if an unseen bridge, to span the turbulent River of Life and bear him securely across from this world to a better, the beautiful bridge of humble reliance on the Almighty Creator and Ruler of the universe.

POSTSCRIPT.

From that day William Edwards' fame as a builder of bridges and smelting works was assured. But he could see defects in his Bridge of Beauty; the ascent to the centre was steep and toilsome, and although he was afterwards called upon to erect bridges, not only in Glamorganshire, but in Carmarthenshire and Brecknockshire, he built no more on the same model.

His handsome three-arched bridge over the Teify is pierced with hollow cylinders over the piers, adding beauty to strength; but in that as in others he reduced the height with more regard to the useful than the picturesque.

He was a busy man, working for his family and the community six days a week, giving the seventh to divine service amongst his people — services so highly appreciated that in 1756 he was ordained to preach.

And he was never a rich man, he gave so largely of his earnings to the suffering poor. And though he must have seen towns springing up around the ironworks he built, and highroads made to connect them, giving employment to hundreds of workers, he was nevermore heard to boast of *his* doings. He knew and owned that the capital of other men had set his brains and hands at work.

And when at a ripe old age he was laid to rest under the shade of Eglwysilan Church and its giant yews, he left his well-trained son David to inherit his fame and his faculty as a bridge-builder. But he never built a Pont-y-Pridd, and it is with the bridge and town of Pontypridd William Edwards' name is mainly associated, even by those who never recognise in him a pioneer of progress, a benefactor to South Wales.

Indeed, since his day, to meet the increasing traffic, a canal has been cut from Cardiff northward, and the very course of the River Taff diverted, changing the character of the district I have attempted to describe as it was in my hero's day. More recently a railroad to meet the ever-growing demands of ironmasters, colliery owners, and others, has been constructed, still further changing the face of the country, now bristling with iron and tin works. A new bridge has, moreover, been thrown across the river, somewhat higher up the stream, a bridge more in accord with modern requirements, and which has in a measure superseded high-pitched Pont-y-pridd; but the beautiful old bridge is still standing, a picturesque monument to the memory

of its persevering and pious builder, and a reminder to this self-sufficient generation, so proud of its own grand doings, that, but for William Edwards and his bridges and furnaces, progress in South Wales might have slumbered a generation or more.

THE END.

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